SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE / PC / PLAYSTATION / XBOX / Vol 14 Issue 6

NAG

Diablo III

There are 141 steps down to hell, we take 8 of them

Previews

Rugby World Cup 2011

Jonah Lomu Rugby Challenge

Bodycount

Lollipop Chainsaw

+ MORE!

Hardware

AMD Llano APU vs. Intel Sandy Bridge – we slice the potato

In honour of *Diablo III*'s random dungeon spawning we've done the same with the *NAG* cover DVD. If it's not here then it's either on the cover of Popular Mechanics, Runners World or Cosmopolitan. Enjoy the hunt.

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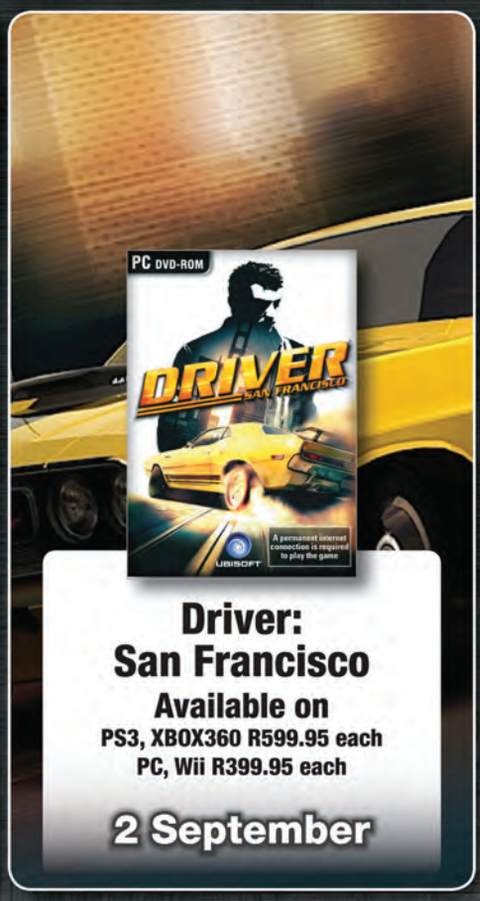

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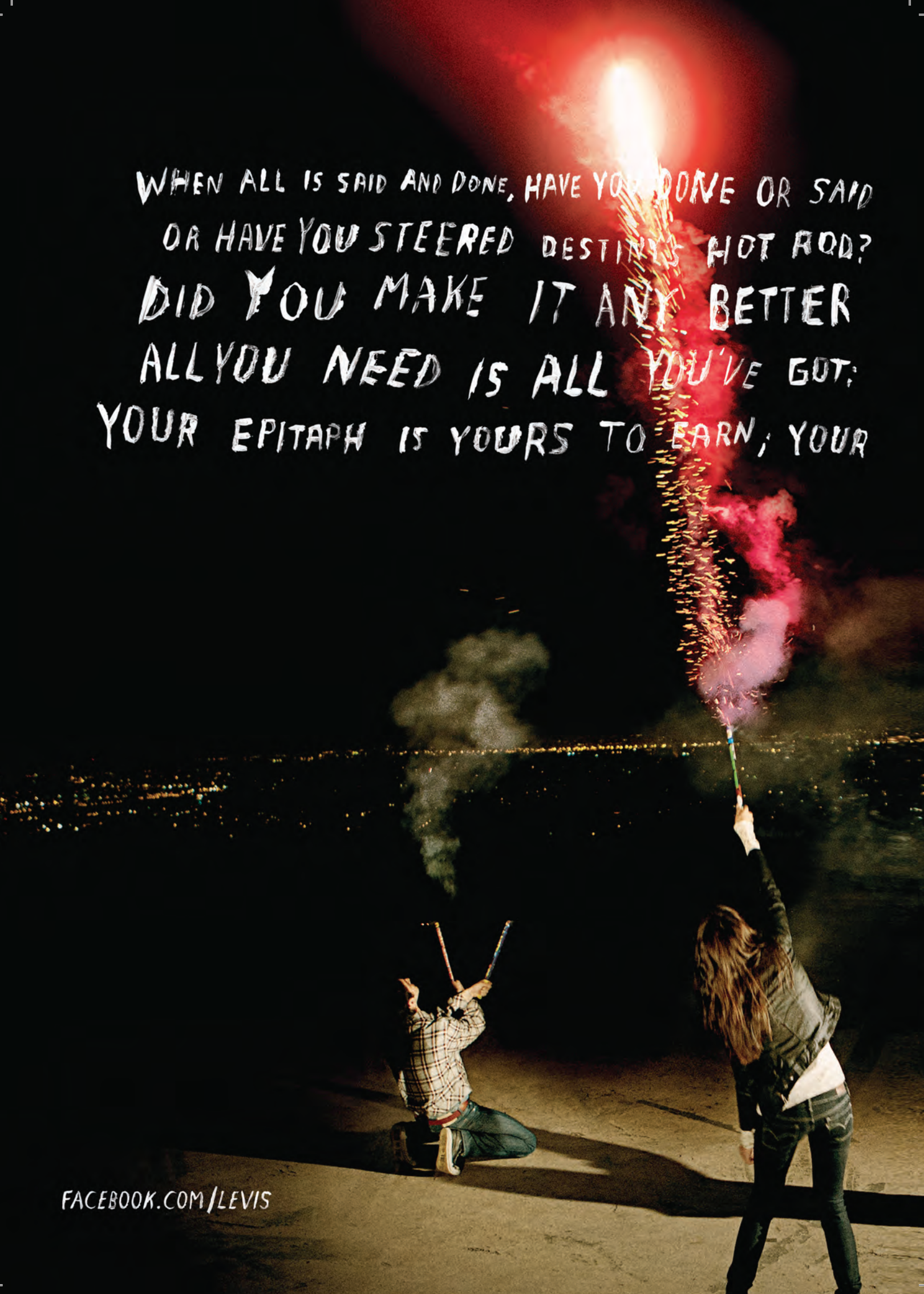
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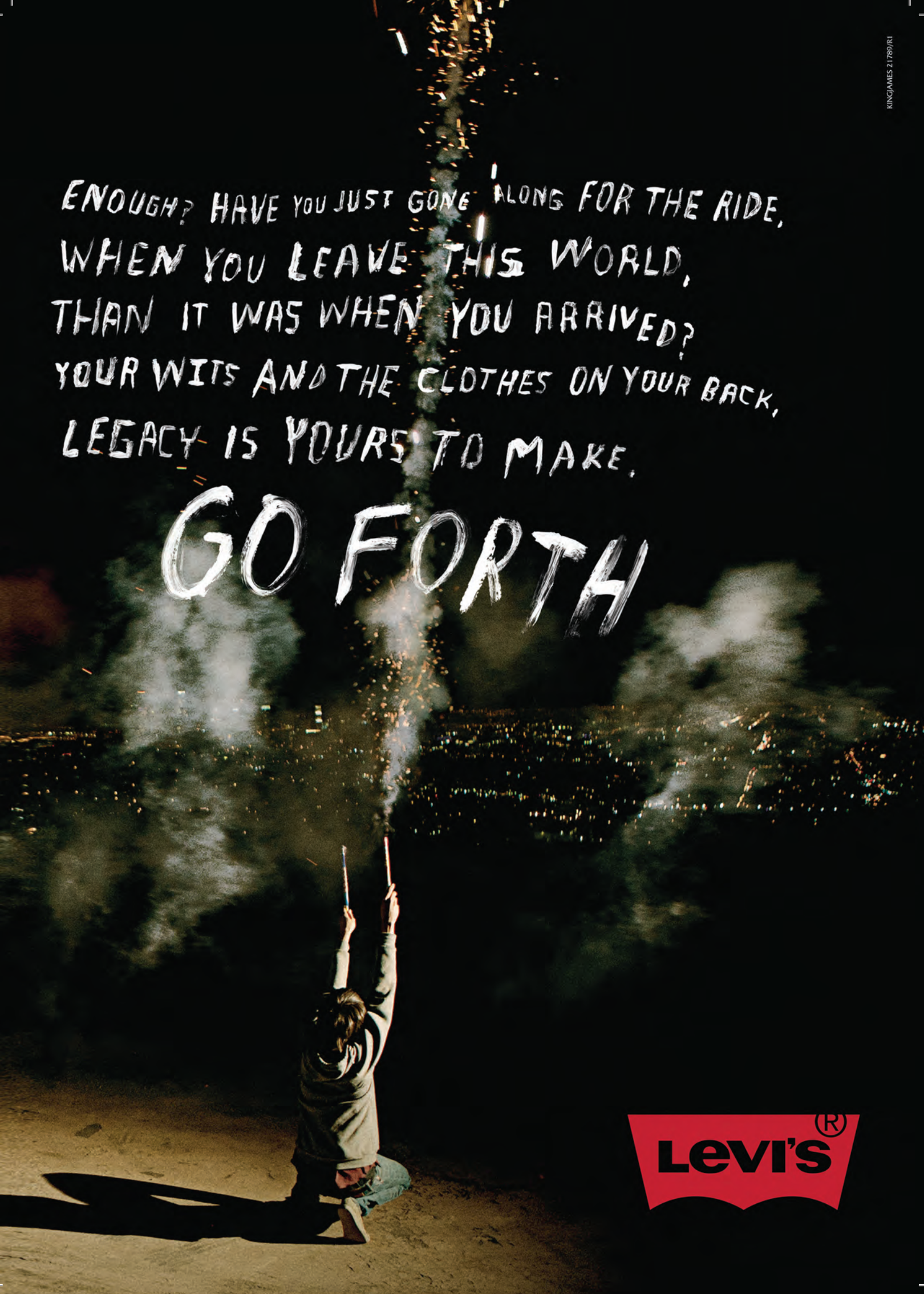
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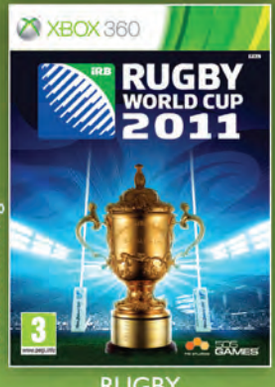

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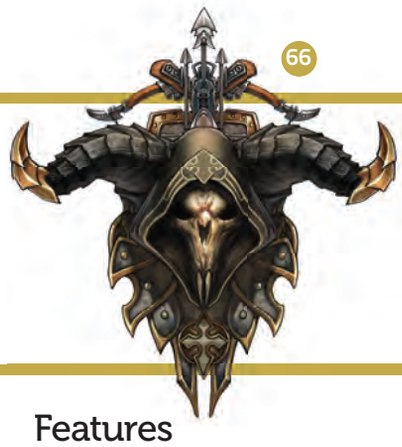

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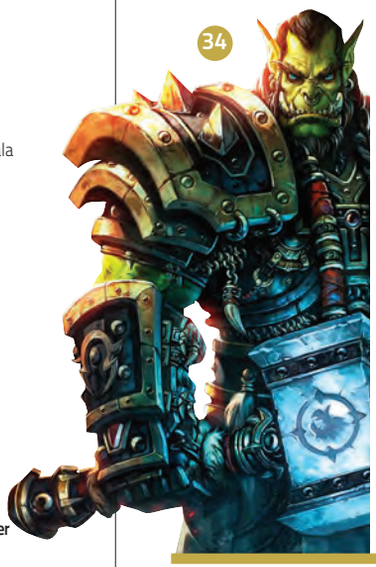

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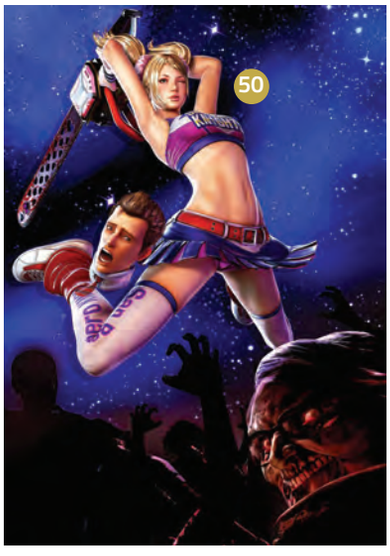

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Turning the uncanny page

Sony has an Internet TV now. Celebrities are using Twitter (but really, who cares). Everyone is trying to figure out which smart phone / tablet / notebook they need. It's a bit of a laugh because the companies that make these new age products know something is happening but don't really know what that something is. I sense great confusion in the universe and some of that confusion has filtered down into the NAG cooking pot. This is about a question about going digital.

It's easy for us to do. We've got everything set up to run digitally so you can enjoy NAG on a HTC Flyer or Samsung Tab or an iPad (what is it 3 or 4 now?) or whatever. The technology is there to produce *NAG* digitally and then consume it digitally.

The question is why.

Why turn *NAG* into .PDF files with a straight conversion from paper to bits and bytes? Why not enhance the magazine so it's a fuller digital experience – but then what about our loyal paper magazine fans – that won't be fair to them. Also, we have a website – perfectly made for digital consumption. The other thing is then we have to create a whole new department to make this digital creation for an untested and unknown market. This market is also confused because there are so many new and changing products out there. The other, *other* thing is how long until the next fad arrives and the pads are out and everyone is buying slim-books or whatever new catch-buzz-phrase the marketing people dream up. Remember what happened to netbooks. Then there's the culture question – I don't see everyone in coffee shops, on the loo or in bed with cold steel and plastic – people like paper, the feel of it and the comfort of holding something. The other, other, *other* big question is what are we supposed to do with the DVD, we've often seen that the DVD is a major reason to buy NAG. But then as the Internet becomes faster and cheaper will there still be a need for a *NAG* DVD in the future or even a Blu-ray. So many unknowns, mysteries and questions and of course fresh pressure to do something about it...

Oops, almost forgot – save the trees right. Good argument. But, the paper we use (and most others) comes from sustainable sources. Right now there are saplings coming out the ground and into the sun being grown specifically to print *NAG* on in 20 years' time. That is of course if we're not all using E-paper by then or will it be wireless (b)-rain chips.

So yeah, if you'd like to air your views on this topic, think I missed any vital points or know I have it all wrong then please do let me know (letters@nag.co.za). We'll definitely do something 'digital' soon so it might as well be what most of you think you want right now.

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[Editor]

COVER STORY

Holy cow! It's *Diablo III*. We even managed to get a gold foil logo on this issue to commemorate the occasion. *Diablo* means a lot of different things to games. Their first videogame love, their first hack and slash, their first RPG, their first obsession with loot and so on. You'll find Matt Uelmen's Tristram Village music on most iPod playlists somewhere (well for real gamers anyway). It's a series that changed gaming and now here's number 3 (or III rather). Just know that this game on the cover means this issue of *NAG* will sell the most copies ever in our short 13 year history. The other game that achieved a record sell-out for us recently was *StarCraft II*. Both Blizzard games – makes you think. Geoff went to Irvine, California to play the game and would like to thank Pierre-Yves Deslandes from Blizzard and Francesca Squellerio from Activision for an epic trip to hell.
For a real sweet nostalgic slap in the face go here: **www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2evlg-aYw8**.

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Letter of the Month September 2011

From: Brendon
Subject: Movie and gaming developers should collaborate

The other day I went to chill at my bud's house for the afternoon. He was (as usual) sitting by the PC jamming Duke Nukem. I was going through his DVD collection to find an interesting one to watch and stumbled upon a DVD I'd never heard of before, Dead Space: Downfall. Apparently it's some cult animation which I only later discovered was the prequel to the first actual Dead Space game. A game I was never interested in playing! So I loaned it by my bro and watched it at home and being a fan of animated films I liked it very much, so much that I wanted to play the game.

This got me thinking that game developers and movie producers should start to actually combine stories with each other so that both could benefit from it, like EA did with Dead Space. These companies can do side-projects where one format starts one half of the story and the other format finishes the second half but on their own terms so they could bring their own creativity and ideas to the table. Imagine a production company like Paramount pictures (that brought us Friday the 13th) made the first actual Texas Chainsaw Massacre with Leatherface killing everyone in his home town and ending with only one character, the protagonist, escaping. Then a game creator can make a game like Texas Chainsaw Massacre: Investigation, where this survivor now goes to the police and you, a detective, of some rundown Texas police station, must now go and investigate what is going on in this town.

I think this is a great way of creating entertainment that everyone could benefit from. From the creators of these formats to the gamers and movie fans. I really look forward to see more of this in the future, but for now I finished Dead Space 1, now playing Dead Space 2 at the moment and I love it!

Your enthusiasm is commendable. There are many current projects similar to this in the works and also in the past. Portal 2, for example, featured an online comic before the game was release, same story with id Software's upcoming Rage. The Avatar game took a look at an alternative perspective on the movie, The Matrix did the same and I could go on. Of course you can't talk about these innovative collaborations without talking about the dark side – lacklustre and rushed-to-release movie-to-game conversions. These horrible creations do so much damage to the concept that they risk killing it before it even crawls from the womb. The good news is that videogames, as a medium, are in their infancy and we haven't even begun to grasp the possible future collaborations all these entertainment platforms hold. Ed.

The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most inspired bit of wisdom or cleverness.

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From: Isma-eel
Subject: Doomed Console of the future

I am quite concerned with the direction in which the games industry is headed. My prime point of concern is this obsession with motion controllers. First we had the Wii. It required you to attach a wrist strap to your hand, place a sensor bar near your TV and make adequate room available so that you don't accidently cause an accidental accident (yeah it sounds funny). So before I used this console, I had to do some preparation. Next we had the PlayStation Move and Xbox 360 Kinect. These two babies required me to setup sensors / cameras – more preparation – fine. Next we have Wii U. With its new trump card, better depth perception by mimicking my movements on the controller, to movements on screen (which happens to also be on the controller) I am sure that this new device will require a sensor bar of some sort and more preparation work before I can even use the freaking thing. I just want to pop in a game and play. Games are supposed to make you feel relaxed and make you want to use it, but this quest for immersion and motion control sickness forces me to have to gear myself up mentally before (playing) them. When will we stop going down this road. I think one day we will be required to own special clothes, glasses [3D – tick, Ed], shoes, helmet, before we can even start playing on the console of the future. Then when the console is finally setup, we will need a room the size of a mansion to move around freely, a TV the size of a car, CCTV like cameras attached to all the walls in the room, a special mat and finally a pack of defibrillators to prevent life threatening cardiac attacks. I am aware that some of you who read it might label me as a square or a person who does not like change. Go ahead if it makes you feel good. Pac-man would be ashamed to see us this way.

Motion control is just a stepping stone. I guess the ultimate 'game' would be something like the holodeck in Star Trek, that, or a tiny brain implant that gets the job done by inducing a unconscious 'game dream' or something like that. The bottom line is realism. Game developers have been chasing this digital grail for years. Of course, if you don't like motion control games then just don't play them. Ed.

From: Ruan
Subject: The bug, it's coming...

Bugs in games are a conspiracy to make short games longer!

It sounds weird when you say it out loud but it might not be too far away from the truth. Haven't you noticed that a lot of the games with bugs have a very short campaign, which seem longer when you're dealing with a pile of bugs and glitches? These are also often the most hyped games, which people expect a certain length from. If you've been playing a very difficult game but forgot to save before you hit the glitch, you will probably try to find a way around it. And even if you do, it will take quite a while thereby "adding" to the overall playing time. This seems to happen a lot with the big budget games too, they didn't have enough time to make a longer game so they left a few bugs lying around to slow you down. Some of the worst bugs like the auto level reload, or getting stuck behind an open door can add 15-30+ minutes to a level. At the end of it all you think it went on forever, having played for 2 days straight. That is until you Google completion times and find out that you only had to play it for 6 hours altogether – all because you kept getting screwed by the game.

Thanks for helping me complete my list of the top ten crackpot conspiracy theories in the gaming industry. Ed.

From: Marius
Subject: Difficulty in games

Difficulty in games is n tough subject. Firstly, not all gamers are equal in skill. And secondly the difficulty curve should be perfect. Now a lot of games get judged for being too easy, or too difficult or, inconsistent in difficulty. But what is the perfect curve? How do developers know when to make a game easier or more difficult? Sure they use game testers but these guys play games for a living. How do they know that it's too easy? Okay, so you can choose a difficulty setting in most games but which one is right? Too easy and you run through the R600 title in under 4 hours. Too difficult and you may end up getting frustrated and throw your controller. And since controllers are now wireless they bounce off the couch and end up in the bushes.

Some might play a game on an easier level to follow the story the first play through however very little games deserve a second play and since surprises have been revealed in the first run the second play, although on a higher difficulty, may be just as easy.

I remember the first time I faced Diablo in Diablo 2. He handed me my ass on a silver platter but the difficulty was perfect since I did not get frustrated but motivated and 30minutes pure ecstasy. But the second run was a disappointment as I knew what to expect.

So this truly is the holy grail of perfection. That balancing point where a game edge on fun, tilt to challenging but do net lean over to frustration.

I feel your pain. Over the years (based on my personal preferences) I've found that medium/hard is usually the best setting for me. Unfortunately no such setting exists in most games – easy is always too easy and hard is just too punishing to be fun and medium is... well medium (read: boring with interesting bits). Some games like Left 4 Dead adjust the difficulty as you play, reducing ammunition or increasing enemy spawns depending on how well you do. This is a growing area of interest/concern and I'm sure in the future games will determine your 'level' by just sniffing your armpit. Ed.

From: Dave
Subject: Competition winners?

I'm just wondering who won the Red Faction: Armageddon competition on the web, because I sent through many letters and none of them seemed to get a reply.

I don't reply to competition entries (there

Shorts [extracts of LOL n00b from NAG reader letters]

"And then when spring comes we go to our mating festival known as rAge."
– Shaderow

"This is something any arsonist should know."
– Ruan

"I would just like to ask about the letter of the month winners and when they get chosen as the winners? And when do you think the best time to send the messages to NAG?"
– David

"They don't let me outside anymore. Not after the incident."
– Subject 13

NAG Fan artwork

This is the cream of the crop that we received at NAG this issue. If you insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. Remember, don't just stick the logo on a picture – use the logo in a picture or you win squat.

Trystan Rivers, "Anyways, I made this in Minecraft. It's the NAGHQ. I didn't fill the offices because that is up to the people whom own the offices."

are way too many of them). We do get them all and a winner is chosen at random. Then Jacqui lets that person know. Ed.

From: Hayley
Subject: Success!
Men and women of NAG, this is the moment you have all been waiting for! In a completely real and scientific study, me and a group of students from my science class have proven that gaming increases your awareness level and hand eye co-ordination. How did we achieve such an amazing feat, you ask? I can't divulge any specifics, but it goes pretty much exactly like this: First we played a strictly regulated game of Black Ops (lasting roughly 5 hours), interspersed with snacks guaranteed not to affect our concentration (stuff like Red Bull and wine gums).This was followed by a few specially designed tests (involving catching tennis balls, failing miserably at darts, and more than a few injuries) to help discern whether gaming has a positive effect on physical capabilities. Our (fixed) results showed an overwhelming amount of evidence pointing to the obvious truth: gaming is 100% good for you. Hope you guys are pleased with the results, and thanks for the awesome magazine, keep it up! PS We scored 87%, just in case anyone doubts the experiments validity ;) PPS Just out of interest, does Barkskin wear a suit to work? He seems the type, from his writing, I mean...

You had me convinced I was dealing with a bunch of smart scientific types until you asked that Barkskin question. Now I'm just laughing at your letter and your results. If I told Barkskin to wear a suit to work he'd probably arrive in chainmail. Ed.

[Unedited, Ed]
From: Dino
Subject: Perfection sounds boring
Dear NAG team thanks for a great magazine (I buy it most of the time for the CD) [*Dude! Ed*]. Perfection suck a great word... unless it is used for describing anything, it plainly means this is how good it gets and that for me that will suck. Everyone is looking and making the game that be will be perfect and please let that never happen. We all say be happy and satisfied with what you have got and if we were we would still be living in caves. Being unsatisfied has made us great we invented because of it we explored because it and most important we made mistakes because of it. This also applies to games if we where satisfied in the beginning when digital games came out we would play the same 2D game over and over and over and over... There would be no Kratos no Dante no Lara Croft no Mario and no Duke Nuke the hell out of them. Be happy if games fail and blows a lot because for every 182.87 (real number LOL) mistakes a brilliant idea is born. No one really ever learns from a success we learn (if we choose) from our blunders the thing that wiped us from our feet and we will get up again we will become stronger and games get better. Tank you balls 3D fighting game (didn't play it but seen it on screw attack) you help making SFVI and MVC3 and thank you NAG for your mistakes and those you will make that why I will keep reading you (aka looking at the gaming videos). As long as humans are making games perfection will never describe them and I will live happy ever after about it.

You can't say thanks for a great magazine and then say you buy it for the DVD. You're sending us mixed signals, Ed.

From: Jaryd
Subject: Cheap bag of awesomeness
Let me tell you about that cheap bag awesomeness...Every last Thursday of the month I go to the Shell garage and walk to the same place, the workers usually greet me with the same greeting "Hello Jaryd do you want the usual bag of awesomeness?" and I reply "Yes please". They give it to me in my hands and my face lights up with joy this is the greatest thing since slice bread I say to myself. The moment I grab the bag it feels like time has slowed down everybody is looking at me with a smile and they are clapping slowly and probably even saying to themselves "This guy is the man". Everything goes dark and a spotlight is shining on the bag and I. I walk over to the counter to pay and the cashier says that will be R42. I looked amazed and even though I know the price it surprises me every time so little money for so much awesomeness. I walk outside and everyone is chanting: Open it! Open it! Open it! I do as they wish and tear of the plastic. As I take out the bag everyone is amazed as a guy wearing army uniform greets us while his left shoulder is on fire and a tank and two jets are in the background. I open the magazine and there is a flood of epic proportion. But this flood is not water but actually the awesome content of the magazine. Things like game reviews, releases and previews spill out of the magazine like a happy leprechaun sliding down a rainbow into his pot of gold. Everyone looks and scans each page slowly and carefully to try and take in all of the awesomeness and then we do it for a second time just to make sure every bit of information is absorbed and we do it again for a third time to try and locate Scarlett the women that makes all of our eyes hurt. There is so much more that I have not mentioned in this awesome magazine as well as a just as awesome CD. This awesome magazine is named NAG (It stands for Naturally Awesome Gaming magazine; among other things) and I still can't believe it only cost me R42.

Okay NAG staff. Whose mom is this? Ed.

On the Forums

Seeking advice from strangers who want you to fail? Come on in... Almost everyone is welcome: http://www.nag.co.za/forums/

Question: Mining games are the hip fad in the industry right now. What's the next big thing?

Spindleshanks: Mine nationalization games.

Jerkydarkstar: How about a janitor game, you know cleaning stuff.

Uranium238: Games where you fling birds into giant fortresses made by a certain "evil" animal.

CrashHelmut: Motion controlled 3D games, with supplementary muscle relaxants and headache tablets.

ZoRPA: Games where you will start on Earth, then advance far enough to go to other planets. Then mine there and trade with others online. That sounds awesome, now that I think about it.

Jodez: Zombie mining games!

Dark Prince: So you're a miner right, then all of a sudden a machine breaks through the mine and several soldiers jump out hand u a weapon then fight hordes of aliens in a mine that's falling and you and 24 mean are the only ones left to plant a nuke and save the world! Yeah that's it, a bit of a vague vision... :P

Shaderow: Crossing games EG: Marcus Fenix and master chief battle a locust flood crossbreed! or Mario and Starkiller take on Darth Browser!

spjt07: Games that simulate what it's like to work in the servicing industry like dustbin collection etc.
hideinlight: Real money auction house games like Diablo III

Changsta 187: A reality shooter, like the one shown in Gamer (without anyone dying of course).
echo: I don't play miner games, only adult games (Zing!).

Toxxyc: RTS. I hope.

Zoop: Diamond mining up in Africa.

ShawniF: Science-fiction Multilayer FPS games because one day soon we'll all be sick of the modern war period just like WWII all over again.

5h@un13: Crazy people going on a rampage of creativity, making giant floating NAG signs in the sky.

Sea Otter: Oil rigging games.

Ro$hi: An app where you sabotage Justin Bieber's performance by throwing stuff at him.

EndKreator: Deforestation games, definitely.

Darranged: Mimecraft for certain.

Sci_Ghost: The next big thing has already hit us, it is called free to play MMO. Marketing results show a huge surge in full product purchases.

Fenn: Playing as Moses, leading his people to Kanaan. There is magic already LOL, just need some fighting and a lot of humour.

Miz3r: Mining is the beginning, next it will be how many trees you can chop down, first one to deplete the ozone layer wins. And remember kids, learning is fun.

It's not you, it's me (but we can still be friends)

For me, throughout this current generation of consoles, Nintendo has always had this sort of lukewarm appeal – like sex with somebody you're not entirely attracted to, which is still sex so, umm... yay? I'm not entirely attracted to their products, but there's still promise of some enjoyable experience in there somewhere. As a gamer I should be gagging for gaming hardware, and yet we're sitting at the tail end of Nintendo's console cycle and I can count on one hand the amount of Wii games I've played. Those games that I have played are the only ones I've wanted to play and I've done so on a borrowed console; I cannot bring myself to buy my own.

Nintendo's next generation of gaming hardware is looming but I still find zero appeal in it. Instead of causing geek-fuelled mass hysteria, when Nintendo unveiled the Wii U the debut kind of fizzled and popped. The Nintendo faithful were excited to see the Japanese company trying to innovate further. Others were left scratching their heads

"It's taken me a while to realise, but despite being somebody who is thoroughly into gaming I feel I'm no longer Nintendo's target market."

wondering whether the new controller (with its built-in touchscreen) was Nintendo clutching at straws in the name of innovation. The company's share price nosedived in reaction to the reveal – clearly the Wii U was not what many were expecting.

Disastrous 3DS sales have prompted a substantial price cut across the globe, and the paltry collection of currently available 3DS titles is only exacerbating the situation. In a form of corporate flagellation, Nintendo's president and other high profile employees have taken sizable salary reductions because of the botched 3DS launch.

Nintendo, it seems, is beginning to lose ground.

I'm not afraid to admit that at times during Nintendo's rise to dominance I wasn't above making snarky comments about the company. I've bitched about how Nintendo has built itself up to be the dominant manufacturer of this generation because of its exploitation of two factors: quirky hardware and nostalgia. Quirky hardware equates to creative game design in most cases, but that hasn't often translated into games worth playing – *Nintendogs* anyone? For some people (especially those new to gaming) innovative and accessible controls are enough to punch their ticket for the Nintendo YayTrain. For the more jaded who see the hardware innovation as gimmicky, that's where the nostalgia bit comes in. This is also where I think my problem is: I have very stunted nostalgia towards Nintendo games. I blame my parents and their refusal to buy me one of those Golden China rip-offs we had in South Africa during the early nineties.

With the launch of the Wii, Nintendo moved onto an infinitely more manageable casual market; a market that isn't quick to judge and condemn like many "core" gamers do. I do, however, get the uneasy feeling that the Wii U is meant to unite these two vastly different groups. Nintendo is once again reaching out to core gamers because they are the sustainable market; the market more inclined to continually buy games. Nintendo is, however, doing so an entire console cycle late.

I'm no "Nintendo Ambassador" but I can appreciate what they've done for the industry. It's taken me a while to realise, but despite being somebody who is thoroughly into gaming I feel I'm no longer Nintendo's target market. No amount of me *wanting* to like what they have to offer is going to change that, but I don't think that's necessarily their fault.

Miklós Szecsei

Hardcore aspirations

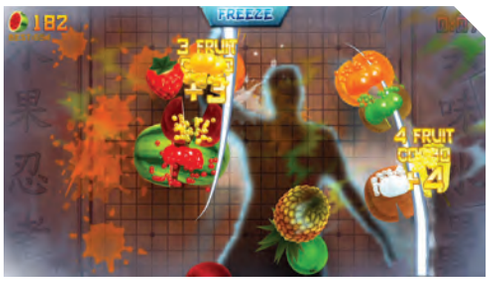
You'll get your sweaty mitts on Dota 2 this year

Valve has confirmed that their big-budget action RTS sequel to immensely popular *Warcraft III* custom map *Defense of the Ancients* will rear its competitive head later this year. That's obviously subject to change, but it's nice to have some sort of time frame to work with. That's not all the *Dota 2* (apparently the capitalisation of that name is correct, presumably altered to differentiate it from *DotA* a bit) news we've got for you, however, although it's probably not of much use to you by the time you read this, since its relevance will have already been shot in the face by the passing of time.

That's because it relates to Gamescom 2011, which will already have come and gone by now. Still, it's nice to know these things if you secretly live in the space behind a nice elderly couple's fridge and can't risk using their Internet connection to check up on the latest *Dota 2* news for fear of discovery, so we've brought the news directly to your rear-fridge enclave. Valve are hosting (have hosted?) a *Dota 2* tournament at Gamescom, wherein the best 16 *DotA* teams in the world will face (have faced?) off for a spot at the top of the podium, which includes (included?) 1 million dollars in prize money for the winners. 1 million dollars! The tournament's called The International, and Valve boss Gabe Newell had this to say about it: "The International is the first public *Dota 2* event and will give the tens of millions of gamers playing *Dota* around the world their first look at the new game," said Gabe Newell, president and founder of Valve. "I have had the good fortune to watch the competitors as they prepare for the tournament, and the level of play is extraordinary."

Yeah, so the news comes a little late. But if anything, it's still relevant in that it proves how serious the folks at Valve are about making this game a true competitive successor to *DotA*.

Motion-controlled arcade



Microsoft seems to be making a very steady push for first-party Kinect support. It's a good thing really, since there are supposedly ten million Kinect units out in the wild – but not enough games. Microsoft has revealed that their plan to fix this doesn't just involve big-budget titles, but XBLA games as well.

According to Robin Burrowes, Xbox LIVE product marketing manager for the EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa – hey, that's us!) region, their aim is to release one Kinect-powered XBLA title a month. It's great news for anyone who feels they've yet to justify the high price they paid for Microsoft's motion-powered money maker.

"Talking more specifically, expect to see more from us - as Microsoft studios - as we leverage the power of Kinect; expect to see a number of Kinect Arcade titles coming," said Burrowes to *CVG*. "We're targeting a frequency of about one a month from the Xbox LIVE Arcade portfolio that will have Kinect integration. That will really be powerful and differentiate the platform."

Burrowes then went on to reassure us that we'll still see a bevy of high-budget, core titles as well. "But you can also expect us to continue to create the traditional, core games - particularly sequels of successful titles on the platform coming very soon indeed."

Wii U won't get a price/ release date until next year

Are you excited for Nintendo's Wii U? So are we! But it seems we've got to be patient about getting a price and release date for the system.

"Since the Wii U we showed you at the E3 show in June was still in the development phase without very specific proposals on the software titles," said Nintendo's main man Satoru Iwata, "we are going to announce the release date and the price next year when we are able to explain the specific proposals."

Iwata has admitted that the 3DS price drop has also raised concerns, fearing that it will affect early adoption of the Wii U by consumers. "With regard to the influence on the Wii U, what we have to take most seriously is that the price markdown could damage the trust of the consumers who bought the Nintendo 3DS just after the launch. I feel greatly accountable for it. Our decision of the price markdown this time has a side effect that, at the launch of the Wii U, people may feel that the price might drop in the near future if they wait. What we will be able to do to recover the consumers' trust before the launch of the Wii U is very important to us."

DOOMsauce: DOOM 3's source code to be made available after Rage

// At this year's QuakeCon, during his keynote address, id's John Carmack promised a substantial gift to anyone who's been itching to freely fiddle around with the innards of the id Tech 4 engine by revealing that *DOOM 3*'s source code will be made available to the world once *Rage* is finally out in the wild.

This follows QuakeCon tradition, with the source code for *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* and *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* having been released last year, while *Quake III*'s source code was opened for dissection a few years ago. With the release of *Rage* just two months away (whoohoo!) at the time of writing this, modders, indies and anyone hoping to have a crack at the source code will soon be able to tinker all they'd like.

Treyarch gets its Wii on

// With all the excitement surrounding the high-powered versions of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* on PC, 360 and PS3, the Wii version of what will undoubtedly be this year's best-selling game hasn't been getting much love. Oh, what's that? You hadn't heard that *MW3* is coming to Wii? Well, it is, and it turns out that Treyarch (alternating *Call of Duty* developer, responsible for *Black Ops* and *World at War*) is helming development. Treyarch handled the Wii version of their own *Black Ops* last year and did a great job bringing the game to Nintendo's console.

What is thing called "Reeeeaaad-ing"?

I recently spent a long weekend away in a little corner of paradise – beautiful mountains, dams, sunsets, fresh air... and no TV. No PS3. No Xbox. No PC. Yup. That's right. A weekend away without technology. Ok, not entirely. We did take our iPods (for what is a weekend without appropriate music), phones (although with no signal to make calls their only function was as a camera) and in my case my iPad.

It struck me as a strange conjunction of technology and isolation that amidst my weekend getaway sans cell phone signal I was still carting *my* bit of technology around with me, on which I would not only be able to play games should I so desire, but on which was loaded my latest novel.

Yes, I had forsaken the feel and smell of paper and ink in favour of the gloss and glow of my virtual book. For the fact that generally I prefer paper over this kind of thing (there's something very satisfying

> **"Yes, I had forsaken the feel and smell of paper and ink in favour of the gloss and glow of my virtual book. "**

about the act of turning a page and/or dog-earing it to mark your place), I found it convenient to know that I, who usually can go through a couple of books in a weekend if left to my own devices, need not lug around an extra backpack just to satisfy my reading urge. With *A Song of Ice and Fire* loaded up, I needed to only keep my iPad charged to enjoy it at every opportunity.

Unless of course it's hijacked by various friends (and my hubbie) playing on it. And therein lies the disadvantage. Very rarely do people pick up and read your book, but put an iPad in front of them and they are compelled to go through your games and try them out, which means that reading time (and battery life) is greatly diminished. Which leads to charging. Meaning you're connected to a power outlet... and thereby confined to the house if you wish to continue to immerse yourself in narrative exploits.

And so I wonder if all this technology spoils us? How many of us still use pen and paper to actually write things down? I'm not talking about signing your credit card slip – things like ACTUALLY taking notes in a meeting. Or jotting down ideas for a column or an artwork. When was the last time you wrote down someone's phone number on your hand instead of pulling out your phone and saving it as "random person I met and will never call again"? And not that it's necessary to get ink poisoning (or whatever they used to tell us at school) to keep the art of penmanship alive, but it makes me wonder as to our reliance on tech.

There are pros and cons to this as well of course. A few months ago my laptop gave up the ghost and there were a couple of days where I was without my machine whilst I waited for a replacement. What to do? There were still reviews to write, work to be done, email to respond to, and I simply couldn't do ALL of that on my phone. And here my iPad was a godsend. Not only could I log on to my Gmail but via Google Docs I could also do my necessary scripts.

I would certainly never forsake my precious technology. That would mean a world without gaming *gasp*. But I certainly do mourn the loss of pen and paper.

Pippa Tshabalala

The sky is too high a limit

Skyrim director has some words to say

Todd Howard, director of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, had some interesting things to say about the games industry in an interview with *PSM3*. Howard seems to think that videogames have gotten way too expensive. With most games toting a price tag in the US of $59.99, Howard believes this should be dropped way down – to around $19. Bold words considering that *Skyrim* itself comes packing a price of $60.

"I've thought for a long time that games are too expensive," said Howard. "I don't put us in that category of course – for what we give you, for sixty bucks or however many 'quid' it is. That's a lot of money for entertainment, so I think the good news is that in certain markets – PC, iPhone, mobile – we can see prices coming down. But I do think industry-wide we would benefit from more games out at $19 or $29. I would try more games. Because I'm not going to try a game for $60. It's a tough decision. That's why people read reviews and previews, because it's not only a money decision, it's a time-investment decision. It's not like going to a movie."

Howard's not the first to lambast the high price of games – but it seems as though none of the big players in the industry are willing to take the first step. It makes sense for certain games to be priced higher than others, especially considering that not all games are created equal in terms of development time and budget. A mediocre game like *Knights Contract*, for example, should not cost as much as incredible games like *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*. Who knows – perhaps if games like *Knights Contract* were actually released at a lower price point, more people would lay down cash on such relatively obscure titles.

Howard also desires a one-console future, likening it to the DVD market. "I'd like there to be only one platform." said Howard. "It's a lot of work to make the games look good on every platform you're on. I often equate it to DVD or Blu-rays. Once I've bought a DVD I can use it in my TV, in my computer, in my car, here, whatever. And I think it would be good for gaming if it was like that."

"They spend billions of dollars selling consoles at a loss for years, but then make the money back with games. It's not like the industry is hurting, we're doing really well. But if I had one wish, you know, we would have better games for a single platform."

PlayStation Vita set for "early 2012" in Europe, US

If you're as eager to get your hands on the PlayStation Vita as we are, you may be disappointed to learn that Sony has altered its launch plan for the impressively powerful handheld. Originally slated for release in the global market "starting" at the end of 2011, that time frame has changed for Europe and the US. SCEI Chairman Kaz Hirai brought the news, revealing that Vita would hit those regions early in 2012.

Meanwhile, Sony has at least stuck to an earlier claim that they made: that Vita would launch in "at least one territory" before the end of this year. That lucky territory is Japan. We'll likely see the powerful device hit our sunny shores shortly after the European release. When asked if Nintendo's 3DS price drop would alter Vita's pricing, Hirai was adamant that Nintendo's surprising decision would not affect it in any way.

"We packed so much into the device and made it very affordable," Hirai said. "There is no need to lower the price just because somebody else that happens to be in the video game business decided that they were going to lower their price." In case you hadn't heard, Vita costs $249 for the basic version, while the 3G-capable version will set you back $299.

Borderlands 2 officially on the way

Website *Eurogamer*, citing "anonymous sources in the industry", claimed to know for a fact that Gearbox Software was busy tinkering away on a sequel to 2009's wildly successful *Borderlands*. About two days after their post went live Gearbox confessed that this was the case. The game was meant to be announced via a *Game Informer* magazine reveal and then followed up by a Gamescom appearance, but Eurogamer's sources outed the game before Gearbox had the chance.

Borderlands 2 will once again support up to four-player co-op, but the four characters from the first game won't be playable. They will, however, make an appearance as NPCs at some point during the campaign. One new character is a dwarf "Gunzerker" called Salvador. He'll be able to dual-wield *any* type of gun found in the game.

AI is getting kicked up a notch and certain enemies will have weapons specific to their classes. There will also be a new element called Eridium, which will act as the currency for upgrading weapons and vehicles in the game. Once again the game will be set on Pandora, but in new regions that have never been seen before. The game is expected during the 2013 fiscal year, which is from April 2012 onwards. And yes, Claptrap will be in *Borderlands 2*. Hooray!

Shocking: Epic says Gears of War 3 leak was "saddening" and "frustrating"

// 'Twas a sad day a few months ago when we heard news that an unfinished build of *Gears of War 3* had already found its way to the torrents. The folks over at developer Epic Games obviously weren't happy about it either. Rod Fergusson, executive producer on the game, told *Edge* that the leak was "saddening" and "frustrating," in particular because he found it disappointing that some fans were actively choosing to "ruin their own experience" before the game's official launch.

Fergusson is particularly peeved at those players who have gained access to the build and posted footage of it online. "I get people going, 'oh no, I just watched this thing on YouTube and it's totally given away something'. And I go, 'well, why did you go looking and why did you watch it?'" The problem is that, when you love the *Gears of War* series as much as so many fans do, it's difficult to resist the temptation of seeing unedited, albeit spoiler-filled footage of it. Sad times for Epic, but hey: they're still going to make a boatload of cash when the game releases this September, which should provide a ton of comfort.

CM STORM
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winner 2011
SERIOUS GAMING SOUND
WITH ITS 8 INDIVIDUAL SPEAKERS THE CM STORM SIRUS 5.1 LETS YOU DIVE INTO THE ACTION WITH HI-FIDELITY SOUND SCAPES AND INTENSIFIED BASS.
4 SPEAKERS ON EACH SIDE
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Beta brilliance

If you ever want a truly exciting and unique gaming experience to get involved with, try volunteering for an indie game alpha/beta programme of some kind. In contrast to most boxed retail titles – which usually budget specifically for a good QA team – indie developers tend to be opportunistic little bastards who never hesitate to lure unsuspecting members of the public into "sneak peek play sessions". They'll have notepads and debug tools at the ready, waiting for those inevitable crashes, game glitches and general pieces of weirdness that only a bumbling, never-played-before user can really latch onto.

Granted, it's not easy to pick a good beta for yourself: vapourware is rampant, devs can be cagey and there's always the chance that the game concerned just isn't that good to begin with. But if you do land yourself in a testing squad, no matter how broad, then congratulations! You've just become the

"The main perk, of course, is that this isn't your job. This is a voluntary activity, and the devs don't have a pay check to wave over your head."

romanticised version of what it means to be a Hotshot Game Tester instead of the cruel and twisted existence that actually awaits professionals in the field.

The main perk, of course, is that this isn't your job. This is a voluntary activity, and the devs don't have a pay cheque to wave over your head. Instead of doing all that boring menu button clicking crap, you can go straight to "testing" the game in whatever way you see fit, as productively (or unproductively) as desired. Whenever you find something wrong, you can write a glorious, long-winded essay about your impressions and ideas for the game and immediately receive more attention than your personal Comic Sans-infested game review blog ever did.

Indie devs usually open up for beta when they're smart enough to realise that the combined thinky-power of a massive adoring public is always going to analyse the game in a way that two or three sunken-eyed bedroom coders never could. This means that they'll actually listen to feedback and shape the game experience through your suggestions – and that's a bragging right if the game turns out to be awesome and all of your friends end up playing it.

"Oh yeah, Game X? I basically developed it. Yeah. The team needed my help in designing and balancing it. Couldn't done made it without me. I also saved a kitten while I was at it. A baby kitten. A box full of them, actually. Spared from *nuclear Armageddon*."

Of course, it's not always a walk in the park. There's a reason that you get to play this game before everybody else does: the general gaming public usually isn't ready for all of the game crashes, soul-crushing profile wipes, relentless balance tweaks and groan-inducing dialogue choices that a typical unfinished product presents. The developers naturally want you to have fun, but the harsh reality is that you really do *have* to be pretty patient and generally act like a good sport. In other words, you have to be better than at least 90% of the Internet.

If you do end up going into a beta with a well-maintained community and regular update schedule, count yourself lucky. It's an interesting, unique and rewarding experience for gamers who really love the stuff they play – and really, exactly what kind of gamer doesn't?

Rodain Joubert

A new way to get started with StarCraft II

If you head on over to Blizzard's Battle.net right now, you may notice the absence of a *StarCraft II* demo. "But why?" we hear you exclaim, "it was there the last time I checked!" Firstly: calm down, damn it. Secondly, look around for a link to *StarCraft II*'s Starter Edition, which you'll find has replaced the demo.

It's not dissimilar to Blizzard's recent move to take *World of Warcraft* in a kinda, sorta free-to-play direction up to level 20. What this Starter Edition does is allow you to try out some of *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty*'s single-player campaign, as well as try out the Terrans in custom games and single-player versus AI games. Here's a full list of everything you can dabble in for free with the Starter Edition, straight from the mouth of Blizzard:

- The first four missions of the *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty* single-player campaign, including Mar Sara 1-3 and the choice to embark on Tychus' first mission or Dr. Hansen's first mission.
- The first two Challenges: Tactical Command and Covert Ops.
- Access to the terran race in Custom Games and Single-Player vs. AI.
- Access to the following custom maps (map selection may rotate over time):
- Xel'Naga Caverns
- Shattered Temple
- Discord IV
- High Orbit

Blizzard also says that "any campaign progress and achievements you earn while playing StarCraft II: Starter Edition are automatically saved to your Battle.net account, and will carry over should you ever upgrade from the Starter Edition to the full version of *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty*." Good times! Head on over to **https://us.battle.net/account/sc2/starter-edition** to try out this excellent game for free.

Battlefield 3 won't be sold on Steam, and here's why

Electronic Arts and Valve are not playing very nicely with each other. The issues stem from Valve's digital storefront Steam and its regulations on how game developers and publishers can interact with Steam customers. This has resulted in certain EA games disappearing from Steam, such as *Crysis 2*.

At first, people thought that EA's decision to remove some of their games from Steam was because of their newly launched digital distribution platform known as Origin. It turns out that that was never the case at all. In fact, there are dozens of digital distribution platforms that still sell *Crysis 2*, but Steam is not one of them.

According to EA: "Steam has adopted a set of restrictive terms of service which limit how developers interact with customers to deliver patches and other downloadable content. No other download service has adopted these practices."

This is the primary reason why *Battlefield 3* won't be heading to Valve's sales platform. That being said, EA was quick to point out that "over 100 other digital retailers" will be selling *Battlefield 3* as well. Clearly this is not some ploy of EA's to force people into using Origin, which incidentally was exactly what Valve did with the release of *Half-Life 2* to get people signed up to Steam.

Successfully dusted

Eric Chahi's *From Dust* has seemingly made Ubisoft very happy with its performance to date, and rightly so: one of the most blatantly unique and naturally beautiful games to come out in the past few years deserves nothing but the highest level of support from us gamers. Released during Xbox LIVE Arcade's "Summer of Arcade" extravaganza, Chahi's environment-altering puzzler topped Major Nelson's XBLA activity charts during its launch week. The previous week was dominated by another Summer of Arcade release, Supergiant Games' brilliantly quirky and colourful action RPG *Bastion*. As is always the case with these activity charts, we've not got exact sales figures, but topping the activity charts remains an impressive feat for both games.

It's so impressive that *From Dust* publisher Ubisoft has giddily proclaimed that *From Dust* managed to break all previous day-one sales records held by Ubisoft's other XBLA titles. It's fantastic that so many gamers are eager to get in on the game's *Populous*-inspired puzzling and we're sure Mr Chahi is grinning from ear to ear - which gets us excited for the future. You may remember Chahi (an industry legend, responsible for such amazing games as *Another World* and *Heart of Darkness*) being quoted as saying, "We plan to have a major release where we can enhance the experience by adding an editor and a multiplayer mode. If the success is there." We'd hazard a guess that this counts as success being there. *From Dust* is the type of game that's perfect for a bit of creative level editing and we desperately feel the need to pour lava on our friends' villages, so we're hoping Chahi doesn't forget he said those words.

Remixed scribbling

// *Scribblenauts* and its sequel *Super Scribblenauts* are two of the finest games to grace Nintendo's DS. If a recent domain registration by Warner Bros. is to be believed, we've got more *Scribblenauts* on the way. *Superannuation* found a registration for **scribblenautsremix.com**. We're going to go out on a limb here and guess that the "remix" in the alleged game's title refers to either some sort of glorious amalgamation of the content in the original games, with remixed rather than wholly original content. Either that, or it's a remix of the games coming to another platform. This is all speculation, but either way, more *Scribblenauts* is in no way a bad thing.

THQ hires porn stars to do QA testing

Shay Laren: A typical example of a THQ QA tester. (No really, this is very typical)

Publisher THQ is about to unleash *Saints Row: The Third* on the gaming masses. Before that, however, they've hired a bunch of porn stars from the pages of *Penthouse* magazine to do the QA testing on the game. Don't worry, we're sure they've hired *real* QA testers as well, but hiring porn stars is the perfect publicity stunt for this franchise.

According to the game's lead producer, Greg Donovan: "We personally handpicked this QA team and the Penthouse brand based on a number of key factors: their passion for *Saints Row*, their sense of style and *Saints Row* attitude, and above all, their desire to give every player a unique, over-the-top, unforgettable experience. In the end, their selfless efforts are going to put a lot of smiles on a lot of faces." Yeah, we're sure they are. We're also sure THQ took great care in handpicking the team for this portion of the game's development.

This isn't the first time the *Saints Row* franchise has utilised such marketing tactics. In a similar marketing stunt, THQ got Tera Patrick on board (ha!) during the production of *Saints Row 2*. So if names like Nikki Benz, Shay Laren and Heidi Baron mean anything to you, then not only are you confessing to other interests, but you're also probably the target market that *Saints Row: The Third* is aimed at.

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State of the Nation

Nintendo has dropped the retail price on the 3DS by nearly $100 dollars. Some might argue that it's too knee-jerk a reaction to the poor uptake. The DS didn't do so well either at launch, due to a lack of software. Which is what the 3DS is suffering from, until *Mario Kart 3DS* comes out later this year. Then it'll be all record-shattering time again. Nintendo's conciliatory gesture of giving early adopters 20 free games off the eStore is a nice touch. Iwata, CEO of Nintendo, taking a 50% pay cut (along with other heads of Nintendo also tightening their belts) is amazing to see. Western companies just give their higher-ups bigger bonuses when they fail. Activision ran their *Guitar Hero* franchise into the ground and the CEO just pat himself on the back. Another successful rape and pillage, back to the longboats for beer and whores, CEOs!

The price drop of the 3DS is amusing, if you consider the successor to the PSP, the unfortunately-named Vita. Sony fell on their sword to price match the Vita to the 3DS, taking

So, Google+. Heard of it? It's like Facebook, but without the Facebook, and with more Google.

huge losses on hardware. And now their price match is $80 short. Of course, Sony has the software line-up to back up the Vita launch: they've slapped Nathan Drake on everything in the U.S, including Subway sandwiches. He's the first "mascot" Sony has had in a while, next to Sackboy. What's more amusing about the 3DS price drop is all the "analysts" crawling out of their holes to blink at the sun and invent new gods. I've seen "Is Nintendo the next SEGA?" articles, as laughable as that is, trailed by "Is Nintendo the next Sony?" a few minutes later. That's the videogame industry for you in a nutshell: the question of "is X like Y," in varying shades of absurdity.

My thoughts on the Wii U? Nothing yet, still too early to tell. It's nice to see the third-parties backing it up so early (or so they claim). According to them, the Wii U is supposed to be quite beefy, "on par" with the PS3 or whatnot. Considering the PS4 and NextBox are still quite a few years away (five or more) if you believe MS and Sony reps, this means Nintendo is going to be first out the gate again with the next generation of console.

So, Google+. Heard of it? It's like Facebook, but without the Facebook, and with more Google. Except Google's been really funny about privacy on this one. They're insisting that people use their "real names" on the site. Now for people who prefer to go by pseudonyms (like yours truly), this does pose a weird problem. Google replies with "use the name you commonly go by, or most people know you as". Well great! That's "Miktar", and I'll use it. ACCOUNT SUSPENDED. Unfortunately, the account review monkeys over at Google don't quite get what their own "rules" are yet. The arguments over "nymgate" have been hilarious. The "old white enfranchised men club" is out in force, trying to stamp out all "anonymous" activity on the 'Net, claiming that people act like jerks when hiding behind a faux name. It's not so much irony then, that I've noticed that the biggest jerks and asshats in the debate have been the ones using their real names. People don't suddenly stop being asshats just because they're using their real names online. Facebook is proof enough of that.

Played *Cave Story* yet? You should.

The EAs, they are a-changin'

Electronic Arts CEO John Riccitiello recently announced a few changes to the company's structure and how they distribute their games. He's promised a focus on "building [their] intellectual properties/franchises into year-round business." He also made reference to the launch of their digital distribution service, Origin, as an example of their ever-growing digital revenue stream.

Riccitiello intrepidly declared that the company is now "switching from defense to offense" by engaging in its first material reorganisation since forming EA's Label structure back in 2007. A bit of internal shuffling will occur, both organisational and with regards to employees. Here's a list of the changes:

- Peter Moore is now the Chief Operating Officer of the company, a position formerly held by John Schappert
- Current EA Games label boss Frank Gibeau will serve as President of all EA labels
- BioWare will become the fourth EA label, joining EA Games (DICE, Visceral, Criterion, EA Partners, etc.), EA Sports (*Madden*, *FIFA*, *Fight Night*) and EA Play (Maxis, *The Sims*, *MySims*)
- Barry Cottle moves from executive VP to of EA Interactive to heading the division, which now includes Playfish, Pogo, EA Mobile, EA's partnership with Hasbro, Asian mobile and online games and PopCap

"The people who succeed here are the ones who map their creative vision over a deep understanding of what our consumers want," said Riccitiello. "Our Label structure reflects that strategy. It creates a close partnership between developers and product marketers that connects the creative process to our consumers."

So there you have it. News!

They drew first blood!

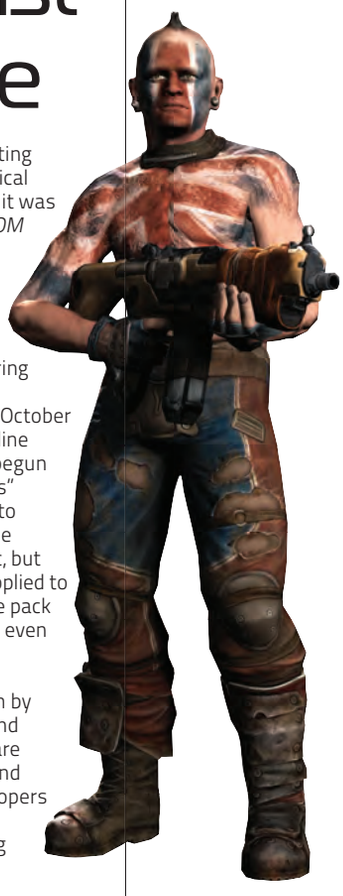
You know who loves John Rambo? We do. You know who else loves John Rambo? You do. You know who loves John Rambo *the most*? Publisher Reef Entertainment, who've decided to revitalise the franchise within the realm of our favourite form of interactive entertainment. Trade site *MCV* brings the word, and the word is...

"I am a big fan of Sylvester Stallone movies, and when we had the opportunity to secure the video game rights from StudioCanal for the *Rambo* franchise, we had to grab it with both hands," said Reef CEO Peter Rezon.

"With the success of the most recent *Rambo* film, and an international appetite for action movies with *Expendables 2* scheduled for release next summer, we felt now was a good time to do something special with this licence."

It seems Reef is deadly serious about using this proposed AAA title to make their mark on the industry. Said Reef's commercial director Craig Lewis: "We have big ambitions for Reef and the *Rambo* IP is the first step in establishing us as a worldwide player." The UK-based publisher plans to produce these titles for PC, 360 and PS3. That's pretty much all we really know so far. Man, we really hope this turns out well, because otherwise we might be forced to disappear into the jungle with naught but a hunting knife and a thirst for vengeance.

Rage against the machine



With so many prolific developers chatting up the PC's ever-evolving technological dominance over the aging consoles, it was only a matter of time before a master of *DOOM* and one of the greatest technological minds in this industry weighed in on the subject. At QuakeCon, John Carmack discussed the challenges in getting *Rage* up to speed on gaming's oldest platform, which has apparently been one of the main focuses during the game's lengthy development cycle.

What's peculiar is that *Rage*'s release this October will not see the conclusion of that particular line of development. Carmack says he's already begun a new project, and that the "research engines" provided by this new project could be added to the PC version of the hugely anticipated game somewhere down the line. It's all very cryptic, but Carmack is certain that this update will be applied to *Rage* on PC, along with a high-quality texture pack to make this already gorgeous-looking game even more visually impressive.

It's been a long time since we last saw Carmack this excited about the PC and driven by its development. When Carmack puts his mind to something, it can only mean good things are coming. As the consoles continue to fall behind technologically, expect more and more developers who still have a focus on pushing tech to its limits to place their focus squarely on your rig and its untapped potential.

PC exclusive FPS explodes out of nowhere

A new Polish developer going by the name of Flying Wild Hog materialised out of thin air and then proceeded to tell the world that they're making a cyberpunk first-person shooter exclusively for the PC. They then added that the game was coming out in September this year, which means if everything has gone well, it should be out any day now!

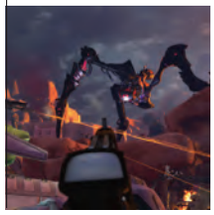
Hard Reset is an FPS made for PC gamers who were raised on titles like *Doom* and *Quake*. The game won't be open world, but it won't be "on rails" either, which is something the developers accuse modern FPS games of being. Instead, the game will have its routes buried firmly in titles like *Painkiller* and will similarly feature wave-based combat interspersed with tight corridor crawling.

In *Hard Reset* you'll take on waves of hyper-violent robots in a dystopian future that bears a remarkable resemblance to the *Blade Runner* films. Count us in!

Flying Wild Hog is made up of developers from a myriad of teams that have worked on titles like *The Witcher 2*, *Bulletstorm* and *Sniper: Ghost Warrior*. The game will focus exclusively on the single-player experience; no multiplayer will be included at all as it was felt that this would distract the designers from creating a highly polished single player game.

Fire falls this December

// Red 5 Studio's upcoming free-to-play online shooter, *Firefall*, now has a release date: this December. In case you're not sure why you should be excited, this is a game being developed by a studio that was founded by Mark Kern, former *World of Warcraft* team lead. Orson Scott Card is co-writing the story. Finally, Scott Youngblood is lead designer on the game. In case that name doesn't ring any bells, Youngblood possesses the mind that designed *Tribes* – one of our favourite games of all time. Put that in your excitepipe and smoke it.



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If your company isn't listed here, phone *NAG* on [011] 704-2679.

Support Lines

Got a legal boxed game and need some technical help? Before you call please do the following. Update your system software, drivers and have a look online for a game patch. Just these simple tasks eliminate 93% of all problems – it's a made up statistic but probably close enough.

Publishers: Activision / Blizzard 2K Games / Rockstar / Ubisoft Codemasters / NC-Soft / Namco-Bandai
E-mail: support@xtrememes.co.za
Number: 0861 987 363

Publishers: Microsoft Xbox
Number: 0800 991 550

Publisher: Electronic Arts
e-mail: zasupport@ea.com
Telephone: 0860 EAHELP/324357

Nintendo slashes 3DS recommended retail price

Nintendo is having, shall we say, some difficulties getting the 3DS to penetrate the market. That elusive critical mass figure is playing havoc on the handheld's gaming line-up as well; numerous publishers have cancelled 3DS game development projects, which is of course perpetuating the whole problem.

The Japanese hardware manufacturer has reported dismal earnings during the first financial quarter and has cut their projected annual turnover by more than 80%. In order to stimulate the 3DS market, Nintendo has lowered the price of the handheld by as much as 30% in some territories. This price cut is a global one set to have been put in place by mid August; expect the local price to go down if it hasn't already done so by the time you read this.

Naturally, this premature price cut mere months after the handheld's launch has left some early adopters feeling a little irate. To combat that, Nintendo has offered all pre-price-drop 3DS owners twenty free NES and Game Boy Advance games on the handheld's Virtual Console. These titles will be finalised and ready for download sometime this month (September).

It seems, however, that the offer of free games is not enough to quell the feelings of resentment in some 3DS owners. In a recent survey conducted by a Japanese gaming site called 4Gamer, it was revealed that 30% of current 3DS owners regret their early purchase because of the announced price drop. The same survey also revealed that 50% of owners feel the handheld's gaming line-up is severely lacking.

Things are definitely off to a shaky start for the Nintendo 3DS. Those in charge of the Japanese company are aware of their blunders and have opted to take substantial salary cuts to make up for the financial loss. President of Nintendo Japan, Satoru Iwata, has taken a 50% salary cut.

Bethesda sends legal threats to Minecraft developer

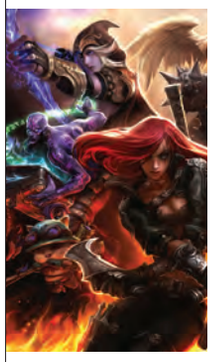
Markus "Notch" Persson and his team over at Mojang are the brains behind the indie success story *Minecraft*. They've got two projects currently on the go: *Minecraft* is still in development and will hit in November this year; they're also working on a new card-based game called *Scrolls*.

But hey, wouldn't you know it, Bethesda has a series that has the word "Scrolls" in it as well. You may have heard of it! The series is called *The Elder Scrolls* and we're all currently salivating over the fifth instalment, which will be called *Skyrim*. But you totally knew all of that already.

Now, and be honest, how many of you instantly thought of *The Elder Scrolls* when you heard that Mojang is making a game called Scrolls? Not very many of you we're sure, but that's not enough to satiate Bethesda's lawyers and their penchant for a legalese-laden bloodbath. In a fifteen page letter to Notch, Bethesda's lawyers claimed that "the sign *Scrolls* exhibits significant visual, aural and conceptual similarities with [the] trademark *The Elder Scrolls*".

According to the lawyers, the gaming public is made up of a bunch of morons who will all too easily associate the two different franchises and assume that they are from the "same commercial origin". In other words, they're accusing Notch of piggybacking off an established Bethesda franchise in order to reach a wider market for Mojang's new game. Never mind the fact that the two games are so vastly different: *Scrolls* is a card-based game similar to what you'd find in a game of *Magic: The Gathering*; *The Elder Scrolls* is a full-on fantasy RPG game set in an open world. Don't confuse the two!

Ever-expanding legend



// Immensely popular *DotA*-like *League of Legends* is all set to unleash a new game mode and an all-new arena on its many millions of registered players, supposedly shortly after Gamescom 2011 has come and gone (so, sometime around now then). Riot Games has revealed a new expansion dubbed *Dominion*, a suitable title considering its focus on this new domination game mode, set in the confines of a new arena - called the Crystal Scar, a "highly contested, war-torn mining village". Riot explains it best:

"On the Crystal Scar players will battle for control of five capture points, holding them to damage their enemies' nexus. The game ends when one team had seized control long enough to drain the opposing team's nexus down to zero. Battles last around 20 minutes, and focus on high-intensity, player-versus-player combat."

That's not all this new update brings either. It'll come with gifts of new items, an improved ping system, a new scoreboard, enhanced announcer doohickies and a *Dominion*-centric matchmaking system. If you've not yet taken *League of Legends* for a spin, it's totally worth a go - just head on over to **leagueoflegends.com** and create an account, it's free.

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Rage development has given id some grey hairs

Rage featured in last month's *NAG*. How delicious does id's post-apocalypse FPS look!? The veteran FPS developer has been beavering away at *Rage* for years now. Built on the new id Tech 5 engine, the game brings a new level of graphic fidelity to all the major gaming platforms. Still, programming for both PC and console hasn't been without its share of issues for id.

In his keynote speech at this year's QuakeCon, id's John Carmack bemoaned the lagging horsepower of the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. Despite this, he added that programming for the consoles was often way simpler than doing the same process on the PC. This constant back and forth between the various platforms drove him nuts during development.

"It is extremely frustrating knowing that the hardware we've got on the PC is often ten times as powerful as the consoles but it has honestly been a struggle in many cases to get the game running at 60 frames per second on the PC like it does on a 360."

The technical limitations of the consoles were made apparent in another area as it was revealed that the install size for the Xbox 360 version would be 22GB big. According to Carmack: "on the 360 we don't have a partial install option; it's all or nothing, which is kind of unfortunate. It means you have to install 21/22GB of stuff which takes a long time but if you've got it and you play it on the 360 that's the way to go." Note, however, that that's not to say the install size will be any smaller on the PC. Still, this has to suck for those who have an Xbox 360 with that tiny 20GB hard drive.

3D on the cheap

In an interview with *GamesIndustry.biz*, SCEE's senior development manager Simon Benson revealed that adding 3D support to games costs as low as half a percent.

"In some cases we've had titles where 3D has been half a percent of overhead," he said in an interview. "It can literally be the render programmer spending a couple of weeks manipulating it. Particularly if a game already has split screen in it, just take that mode of the game and reauthor it to deliver really high quality 3D. So often it's the case of it doesn't even hit the radar of whether we should or shouldn't, it can just be done." Benson says that it's usually simply a case of deciding whether or not the title will benefit from 3D. Bear in mind that this low cost likely only applies to games that don't put heavy emphasis on advanced 3D.

Look & Listen

Pre-orders / www.lookandlisten.co.za

PC

Airline Tycoon 2	October
Sonic Generations	November
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	8th November

Xbox 360

FIFA 12	30th September
Ace Combat: Assault Horizon	14th October
Battlefield 3	28th October

PS3

Batman: Arkham City	October
Rage	October
The Darkness II	7th October

Wii

Champion Jockey	28th October
Trivial Pursuit: Bet You Know It!	28th October
Need for Speed: The Run	18th November

3DS

Zoo Mania	30th September
James Noir's Hollywood Crimes	28th October
Fantasy Petz	11th November

DS

X-Men: Destiny	30th September
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	November
Happy Feet Two	November

Skyrim Collector's Edition – now with more dragon

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim has dragons in it! So does its newly announced Collector's Edition, which makes it a must-have purchase for every self-respecting fantasy RPG geek. The entire package comes with a rather large 200-page art book, a making of DVD, a copy of the game and a 12-inch statue of Alduin the World Eater and Devourer of Shelf Space. Alright, so the main antagonist dragon is actually just called Alduin the World Eater but the mere sight of this 12-inch hunk of PVC will be enough to make any dragon-fearing shelf tremble in fear.

The entire package is priced at a butt-clenching $149.99, which works out to just over R1,000. You have to ask yourself though: is that too much to ask for a 12-inch plastic dragon that just happens to come with one of the most anticipated RPG titles in recent years?

Gonna start a band

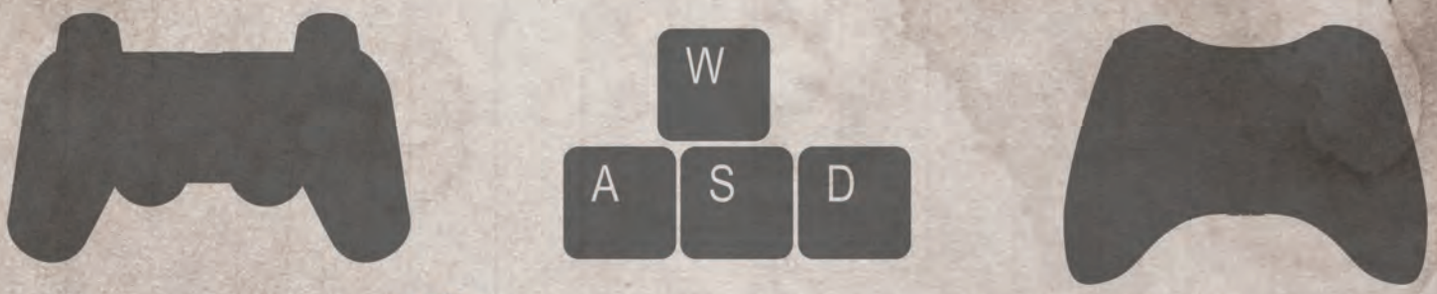
// You know you've got the talent: your air band skills are off the charts. You can silently rock out with the best of the best, shredding that incorporeal instrument with all the feverish glee of a teenage girl at the sight of Hot Famous Guy X. So what if there was a game that let you take your air band prowess to the digital world? That might happen soon, if a USK rating spotted by *Siliconera* proves true. There's a listing for *Kinect Fun Labs - Air Band*, a new *Kinect Fun Labs* thingy that we know absolutely nothing about, other than its presumed focus on imaginary musical shenanigans. Stay tuned for more info.

SAPS make the world's first PS3 jailbreak arrest

// On the 2nd of August the South African Police Service raided a residential home in Parktown, Johannesburg and arrested one suspect. The SAPS were responding to a complaint by SAFACT (the South African Federation Against Copyright Theft) and they found exactly what they were looking for.

The Parktown house contained numerous PlayStation 3 consoles, loads of computers, hard drives, USB jailbreaking devices and circumvention software packages. The police confiscated a total of R100,000 worth of illegal goods that were made up of both counterfeit PlayStation 2 and PlayStation 3 games. This is the first time somebody has been arrested for running a PlayStation 3 jailbreaking operation.

SELECT YOUR WEAPON



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Coming 14 Oct 2011

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Also available on PS3 & Xbox 360
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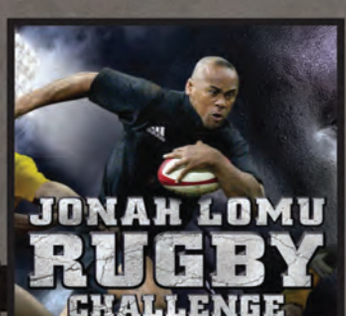

XBOX 360 R529.95
Also available on PS3
Coming 9 Sept 2011

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Xbox 360 exclusive
Coming 11 Oct 2011

PS3 R499.95
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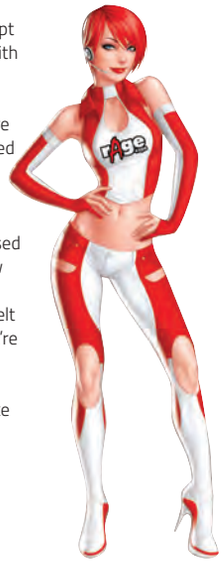
What's that noise?!

Thanks to the redesign we were rushed for time to come up with a new story for the badger. So, instead, we'll just tell you the truth. We're sick of him; we stole him from a stupid flash video like years ago and kept modifying him with more and more ridiculous ideas and stories. We've effectively washed away everything that was good and wholesome with our plagiarised garbage and now it's time to move on. Whoa! That felt good. Instead we're going to whore out a marketing concept and make you find Scarlett from rAge. See if you can find her hiding in the magazine...

Clue: It's in NAG magazine somewhere.

Send your sighting to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line **'September Scarlett'** and don't get it wrong or deleted it will be.



August Winner

Caitlin Geng, Page 92

Win!

a Wii 8 in 1 Goodie Bag valued at R599.99
(Wii remotes not included.)

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Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'September Caption'.

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR / Dust storms work differently on other planets.

LAST MONTHS WINNER / "On this round of Master Chef you have 15mins to spitbraai a flamingo."

- David Edwards

Torchlight II on XBLA: we just can't do it (yet) captain!

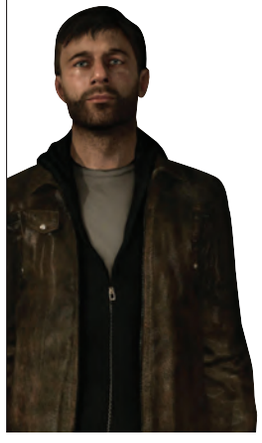
Action RPG *Torchlight* was mighty successful when it released on the PC back in 2009. When it released on XBLA earlier this year, it was again a huge success for developer Runic Games. Thus, you'd expect that the game's upcoming sequel would find its way to Microsoft's console as well. However, it seems that Runic have hit something of a brick wall in the form of XBLA's memory limit, which *Torchlight II* exceeds.

"We're very consciously trying to focus on one thing at a time and at the moment it's getting *Torchlight 2* out for the PC," said Max Schaefer, CEO of Runic. It's not surprising, considering that they're such a small studio and would be better off focusing on making the best of their primary platform. An XBLA release will require substantial alterations, but that doesn't mean you should rule out the possibility of seeing this sequel on your friendly neighbourhood console. Runic very clearly does want to bring the game to consoles, going so far as saying that they would "absolutely consider" a full retail release of the game if that's what it takes.

Is Infraworld Quantic Dream's next game?

// Sony Computer Entertainment has filed a trademark for *Infraworld*. If that name is unfamiliar, it's a game that was in development as far back as 2006 over at *Heavy Rain/ Fahrenheit/Omikron: The Nomad Soul* developer Quantic Dream. The game was eventually cancelled because "the concept did not appeal to publishers." There's even an easter egg referencing the title in *Heavy Rain*.

The trademark filing has led people to believe that *Infraworld* is the name of the studio's next game, one of two rumoured to be in development right now. The other is *Fiv5*, a name which first appeared following a domain registration and trademark filing made by Quantic Dream. With regards to *Infraworld*, we'll likely never know if this alleged game will resemble the cancelled project from 2006, since nothing more than the name was ever revealed.



Only the hottest Batfashion is worthy of Arkham City

A fan site (**arkhamcity.co.uk**) for Rocksteady Studios massively anticipated *Batman: Arkham City* has been compiling a list of alternate costumes that the Caped Crusader will be able to don in the game. You'll find a fan-made image of these six costumes above this text. Each one stands as a pre-order bonus for specific retailers, but Rocksteady has confirmed that all of the alternate costumes will eventually be made available as DLC for the game.

From left to right in the image, you'll see costumes inspired by numerous iterations of the Bat: *Batman Beyond*, Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, Batman: *Earth One*, 1970s Batman, *Batman: The Animated Series* and Rocksteady's own take on the Dark Knight. In other *Arkham City* news, it's been confirmed that Bane (aka "The Man Who Broke Batman's Back") and his Venom-fuelled rage will join Batman as an unlikely ally in the game, fighting alongside him as the duo attempt to take down a gang distributing "chemical contraband."

TERA delayed to 2012

Action-packed MMO *TERA* is no longer set for release this year. Instead the title's release has been bumped to next year. Chris Lee, publishing VP of publisher En Masse Entertainment, had this to say regarding the delay:

"Adding time to our schedule will help us ensure we exceed people's expectations for *TERA*. The game's action combat and depth has generated a lot of interest, and we are committed to making sure every aspect of the game lives up to our standard of quality."

The game's action has been likened to that of AAA, non-MMO action titles, which is what the developers hope will set *TERA* apart from other titles in the MMO space. Looks like we'll have to wait a bit longer to see how those claims hold up.

Release List

Dates subject to change without notice

September: Week 1

Madden NFL 12	360 / PS3
The Sims Medieval: Pirates and Nobles	PC / 360
Driver: San Francisco	PC / 360 / PS3 / Wii
Driver: Renegade 3D	3DS
Bodycount	360 / PS3
Magic: The Gathering - Duel Decks	Trading Card Game

September: Week 2

NHL 12	360 / PS3
Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine	PC / 360 / PS3
Resistance 3	PS3
The Ico & Shadow of the Colossus Collection	PS3
Might & Magic Heroes VI	PC
Dead Island	PC / 360 / PS3

September: Week 3

Child of Eden (PlayStation Move)	PS3
The Gunstringer	360
Gears of War 3	360

September: Week 4

F1 2011	PC / 360 / PS3 / 3DS
Dungeons: The Dark Lord	PC
Boulder Dash-XL	PC
Jonah Lomu Rugby Challenge	PC / 360 / PS3

September: Week 5

FIFA 12	PC / 360 / PS3 / Wii / PS2 / 3DS / PSP
X-Men: Destiny	PC / 360 / PS3 / Wii / DS
Zoo Mania	3DS

September: TBA

Tropico 4	PC / 360
Patrician IV: Gold Edition	PC / 360
Metal Gear Solid HD Collection	PS3
The Cursed Crusade	PC / 360 / PS3

Capcom tries charging for demos

// *Nazo Waku Yakata* is a Capcom title for the 3DS. There's a demo available for it on the Japanese Nintendo eShop, but you have to pay ¥200 for it, which works out at just less than R20. Of course, Capcom is not labelling it as a demo but are instead saying that it's the first chapter in the game for people to try out. Once they've forked out cash to play a portion of the game, they can then make an informed decision as to whether or not they want to purchase the whole game from a retail store. Hey, that sounds just like a demo! Oh wait.

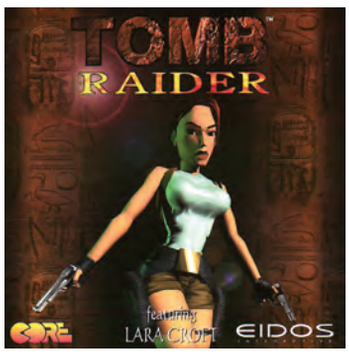
It's a scummy move on Capcom's behalf, especially because there's no mention that the money spent on the demo will be deducted from the cost of the whole game. Pray that this doesn't take off and that Japanese gamers tell them to get stuffed. Once you've prayed about that you can start praying that Activision doesn't catch wind of this. They've already learnt that gamers are stupid enough to pay obscene amounts of money for multiplayer map packs, so charging for demos seems like the next logical step in scumbaggery.

Top 10 games that changed the industry forever

There are certain games that stand above all others. These might not be the best games of all time (although some of them are), but they were significant because they did something so damn special that every subsequent game of that genre tried to be just like it. These are the trend-setters, the genre re-inventors. These are the games that you'll tell your kids about when they're busy laughing at you for not having the latest psionic-enhanced fourth-person MMO puzzle shooter, because their silly gimmicks mean nothing compared to the historical gems represented here.

10 Tomb Raider

Lara Croft was the gaming industry's first massively successful female lead. With that came a ton of sexualisation of the character by the armies of oversexed schoolboys who represented a large chunk of the market at the time, but it was great to have a change of scenery from the burly, armour-clad beard men that dominated games before it. Oh, wait a minute.



9 Halo: Combat Evolved

Let's face it: first-person shooters on consoles sucked before *Halo*. While dedicated PC gamers still haven't figured out what all the fuss is about, *Halo* showed console owners that there's more to life than endless *Mario* and *Final Fantasy* games. It also gave Microsoft a more comfy chair to sit on, and perhaps encouraged Sony to take notice of the new kid on the block at the time.

8 Alone in the Dark

Before *Alone in the Dark*, you had action adventure games, and you had horror games. The two seemed mutually exclusive until this title came along and showed people that it's possible to be utterly terrified while holding a shotgun. It also introduced dogs jumping through windows.

7 Street Fighter IV

First, we had 2D fighters; people loved them and played them to the point of developing painful hand injuries. Then, 3D fighters entered the fray and floundered about a bit until *Tekken* was released. Years later, 3D fighters began to flounder again, and *Street Fighter IV* was there to save the day. It might be a little early to tell, but we're willing to bet that fighting games from here on out are going to stick to their 2D roots.

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6 Everquest

The first MMO that "everyone" played; and one that is still played by thousands of people today since Sony is still releasing expansions for it. It's okay, guys, games are expensive; you just stay right where you are.

5 DOOM

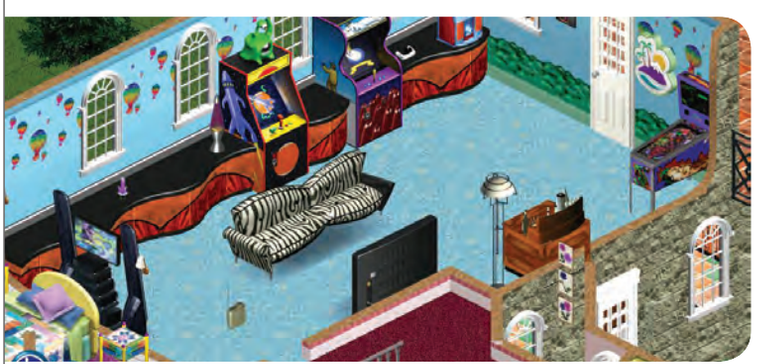
For the first time, your aunt learnt that computers are as good for gaming as they are for organising spreadsheets. *DOOM* made the headlines around the world for its violence and supposedly evil content, bringing the depth and complexities of the gaming industry under the public eye.

4 Warcraft: Orcs & Humans and Command & Conquer

The release of these two titles less than a year apart marked the point at which real-time strategy games diverged – mass unit counts on one side and small groups of tactical units on the other. From this point onwards, games like *Supreme Commander* and *Company of Heroes* would never sit at the same table in the cafeteria.

3 The Sims

Every title before this that introduced the public to gaming pales in comparison to what *The Sims* did to get this segment actually playing games instead of speculating about them in trashy magazines. For the first time, teenage girls could play dress-up with something other than Barbie, and sadistic office slaves could vent their frustrations by locking up housekeeping in the basement without legal repercussions. We should be grateful.



2 StarCraft: Brood War

It took Blizzard four years from the release of their first RTS to get the formula right, and it paid off. *StarCraft* and its expansion not only became hugely popular in the core gaming market, but created the platform from which pro gaming as we know it was born. The game is still played by many pro gamers in South Korea and the rest of the world. Maybe they didn't hear about the sequel or something...

1 Half-Life / Unreal.

First-person shooters before these games involved two things: shooting and a first-person perspective. Few games managed to create the drama and tension that these two games delivered. They gave players a story and a world that was believable, that mattered. Scripted events, wild and interesting enemies and weapons that will stand the test of time – they all came together to make shooters what they are today.

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Tickets:
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Tickets available at Computicket
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OUT OF THIS WORLD

Yes, game fans, it's coming up for that special, magical, supermega time of year again – you can tell by the almost apocalyptic sense of shock and awe disgorging upon the planet like a phantasmal deluge of kitten commandos with gatling lasers and cupcake bombs. The helicopters prowling around the Coca-Cola Dome at Northgate, neon searchlights prowling the parking lot and airborne spec ops snipers marking potential targets through unseen thermal scopes, as couriers in black visored helmets unload battle-armoured hovercrafts at the service entrances. Rumours of a great, fiery eye rising in the east, amassing a host of twisted, howling monsters under its ragged red banner to march upon the peoples of Middle-Earth, or Joburg, or whatever. And the marketing. Mostly the marketing, probably.

So, what's it all about? Games, mostly. Imagine about 100,000,000 square metres of just the best gaming stuff ever – gigantic LCD screens rolling scenes from games not even in development yet, hardware imported from the future, alien technology, supermodels in authentic, custom replica gear from every game ever made, free beer and pizza for everybody.

That's the dream. Now scale it down a bit to actual reality, say about 10,000 square metres and a bunch of LAN gamers who've not had a proper wash in three days, and no matter where you're standing, everything smells a bit like cheap chicken schwarmas. AAAWWWWWW YEAAAAHHHH, that's rAge.

I first attended rAge back in 2007, or about six months into my *Guitar Hero II* addiction. As fate would have the dice tumble and fall about, their spotty faces sneering in ill-gotten triumph, Miktar had decided at the eleventh hour to fit out the NAG stand with... a *Guitar Hero II* setup.

I was quickly drafted into a supervisory role that mostly involved playing through and unlocking the entire setlist so that unwitting members of the passing public, buzzed out on hands-on previews and crème soda could challenge the lamer chick wannabe with the mad hair to Dick Dale's Misirlou and LOSE. "We made a heap of cash hustling those suckers," I'd say, except we didn't. Rules, or something stupid like that.

I'm pretty sure we indirectly sold a lot of *Guitar Hero II* bundles that weekend, though. That's kind of the big thing about rAge – games, games, games everywhere, like dachshund puppies at the local pound, just begging to be taken home and loved forever and ever. Or at least until the next big thing gets here, which is around every two weeks or so on the gamer's schedule. We're

*Games appearing at rAge subject to change.

GAMEZZZZZZZZZ!

This year, rAge is ALL about the games. Games you've heard of, games you haven't ever seen before, games you can play that no-one else has even played yet, and some super secret games that are being escorted under armed guard on an aeroplane from some far distant land. We had to resort to some pretty dirty tactics to squeeze this information out of the local gaming distributors, so please do keep in mind that this list might be subject to change. If you see a game listed here and it doesn't end up at the show it's because someone at airport security confiscated the lumo pink package marked Top Secret.

ELECTRONIC ARTS

Stand AD

FIFA 12 / Battlefield 3 / Need for Speed The Run / SSX / Mass Effect 3 / The Sims 3 Pets

MEGAROM

Stand W & AO & X & AC

NBA 2K11 / The Darkness 2 / Skylanders / F1 2011 / Tomb Raider / Hitman / Final Fantasy / Ghost Recon / Rayman Origins / Assassins Creed Revelations / Just Dance 3 / Gunsmith - Ghost Recon

NINTENDO

Stand U

Nintendo 3DS / The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D / Dead or Alive / Resident Evil / Street Fighter / Steel Diver / Pilot Wings

NU METRO INTERACTIVE

Stand L

Batman Arkham City / Sesame Street: Once Upon a Monster / Lego Harry Potter / Happy Feet 2 / Lord of the Rings: War in the North

PLAYSTATION

Stand V

Dead Rising 2: Off The Record / Dance Star / Medieval Moves / After Hours Athlete (tbc) / Street Fighter vs Tekken / Dragons Dogma / Asura's Wrath / Racket and Clank All for One / SingStar '80s (tbc) / Resistance 3 / Hunted / Super Street Fighter

XBOX

Stand E

Kinect Dance Central 2 / Kinect Star Wars / Kinect Disneyland Adventures / Kinect Sports 2 / Gears of War 3

committed like that.

There's also the LAN, of course, which by some occult warping of time-space and everything in between seems to be getting bigger every year, gradually but determinedly encircling the expo like a Zergling horde. That's why it's fenced off, you know, and we're looking to electrify it next year. Some day, those guys are going to attack – it's really only a matter of time until the complimentary energy drinks breach critical mass in the collective system, and goad bloody rebellion.

So what's in it for you? Games, obviously. Loads of games. Some of all the games you could possibly think of, even, and then maybe three or four others you couldn't. That includes hands-on previews of [*CLASSIFIED*] and [*CLASSIFIED*] and even [*CLASSIFIED*], which means you'll get a chance to play those before everybody else in the *whole universe*.

Oh, and this year, we'll have a viper wrestling pit. It's also invisible, which makes it even more awesome.

Things to do and look out for and get super excited about at the expo this year ...

- Kaspersky Lab [Stand M] - Play the Ferrari Virtual Academy, test their products and stand in line to win some great spot prizes. Find out how to win 2 VIP tickets to the Formula 1 in Sao Paulo in November! Meet their Virus Assassins and watch their very own team - Kaspersky Impi - as they battle it out in the NAG LAN.
- Samsung [Stand Q] - Samsung have big plans for this year's rAge including a massive stand showcasing the latest IT products on offer which are ideal for gaming. Samsung will also be sponsoring the Do Gaming League *StarCraft II* League 2011, currently taking place, and will be hosting the final matches of the *StarCraft II* League Challenge 2011 at rAge, where 15 finalists will battle it out and one will be crowned the *StarCraft II* Champion.
- ASUS [Stand AL] – The focus will be on the ROG range of products and you can win an ASUS ROG Gaming notebook! Other spot prizes to be given away include ASUS ROG t-shirts. Meet the lovely ASUS ladies (aka booth babes) and watch the ASUS overclockers do their thing with

FRAG FEST

Official gaming tournaments to be held at rAge:

- DGL [Do Gaming League] - StarCraft 2 / FIFA 11 Call of Duty 4
- NGL [NAG Gaming League] - Call of Duty Black Ops / League of Legends

"This year 2196 spots are available in the LAN for avid gamers, who will be transported to gaming glory with 53 hours of non-stop intense battle. With mainline sponsor, Alienware, HP Networking powering the network, and Intel taking care of the servers, there are loads of awesome competitions, freebies and general goodies for the LAN gamers at this year's event."

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Samsung	Q
CNA	R
Incredible Connection	T
Nintendo	U
Playstation	V
Esquire	Y
BT Games	Z
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Reserved	AC
EA Games	AD
Telkom	AE
Legion Ink	AF
Comet Computing	AG
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THQ	AJ
NAG / The Verge	AK
Asus	AL
Ster Kinekor	AM
Speed & Sound Magazine	AN
Megarom	W, X, AC, AO
Elementek	1
Skycastle Games	2
Inspir3d Design	3
Chess Conquest	5
Super Net	7
Reserved	8
Cell Art	9
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Kalahari.net	11
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CTU Training	16
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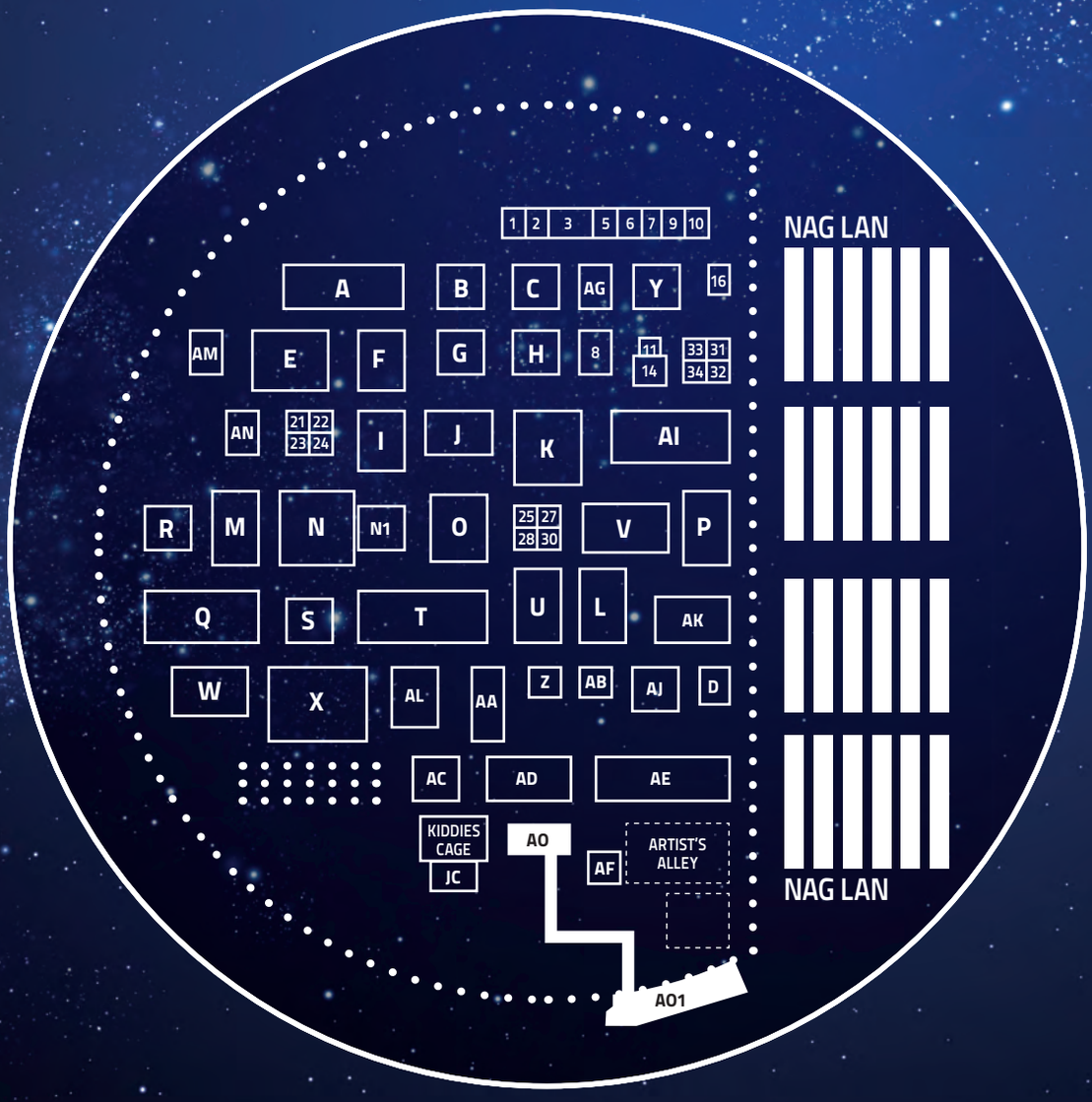
Underground	24
Dynamix	25
Grace Pharmaceutical	27
El33tonline	28
Silveray	30
Zenith Online	
Gaming School	32



"Bearing testament to rAge's heavyweight status, international technology brand, Samsung, has taken up the reigns as the mainline sponsor of rAge 2011, which earns them exclusive naming rights for the 2011 expo"

the latest ASUS hardware.

- Learn 3D [Stand 23] - Featuring their new courses: Illustration, concept design and 2D animation: they will be giving free 2D illustration classes at their stand during the weekend. You can book slots for this on their website. Games Development: they will be running a competition at their stand, where you get to play one of the games that this year's students have developed. The best three scores will receive prizes (1st prize: Sony PSP, 2nd prize: game of choice, 3rd prize: Look 'n Listen voucher). You can download this game from their website before rAge to get some training, but scores will only be taken at their stand.
- Xpad [Stand 21] - Launching their new antibacterial treated A3 mouse pad that will be made on site in under 5 minutes at their stand for R199, so bring along any artwork/image you may want on your new mouse pad.
- Eleetonline.com [Stand 28] - Snag some swag, grab special Afrihost spot-prize giveaways, enter their weekend-long grand prize competition and see your online nick on the wall of their stand. You haven't submitted your nick yet? Go to El33tonline.com's Competitions page to enter now!
- Sapphire [Stand H] – Sapphire will be showcasing their X58 Intel based motherboards running liquid nitrogen and three 69 Series graphics cards to have a go at the 3D Mark records. Catch this on the Frontosa stand. The hot Sapphire booth babes will be on the AMD stand handing out a host of cool products. So keep an eye out for them dressed in gaming gear stolen from Lara Crofts closet.
- Blowfish Entertainment [Stand AB] – Magic the Gathering Innistrad will be released in SA on the weekend of rAge and will be available to purchase at the Blowfish stand.
- Corex [Stand O] – Gamers and enthusiasts can check out the Thermaltake and Corsair products on the Corex stand. Look out for the uber cool Level 10 GT Snow White Edition chassis.
- Elementek [Stand 1] – Launching three new products at rAge: Black Dragon GelL DDR3 Memory, Enhance Corsa GelL DDR3 Memory, EVO Corsa GelL DDR3 Memory. NAG

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* Brightness comparison based upon monitors with same brightness in 2D. *3D glasses are required and are included with purchase.

CHEIL South Africa

The Scrum

Crouch, touch, pause, engage!

Rugby World Cup 2011

Release Date: **Q3 2011** / Platforms: **360 / PS3** / Genre: **Sports simulation**
Developer: **HB Studios Multimedia** / Website: **rwc2011game.com** / Publisher: **505 Games**

VS

Jonah Lomu Rugby Challenge

Release Date: **Q3 2011** / Platforms: **360 / PC / PS3 / PS Vita /** Genre: **Sports simulation**
Developer: **Sidhe** / Website: **rugbychallengegame.com** / Publisher: **Alternative Software**

It seems that World Cup style sports events really drive game sales. We saw it with FIFA – the whole world went nuts for the sport at the time. And we'll undoubtedly see it with the rugby too... oh, no, wait a moment. We won't, because the whole world doesn't play rugby. In fact, only a relatively small number of countries engage in this sport, which is why we so seldom see a rugby game hitting the market. It doesn't make good business sense to spend all that development capital on a game that is potentially limited in sales.

Then again, it is the Rugby World Cup year... and where fans of rugby simulations have had an extremely long dry spell, all of a sudden three games are appearing within the space of a few months. The first was, of course, the lamentable NRL *Rugby League Live* which hit shelves not too long ago. Not only do we not play Rugby League rules here, but the game was, to be kind, a bit on the dodgy side.

However, rugby fans have two more titles to pin their hopes on: *Rugby World Cup 2011* and *Jonah Lomu Rugby Challenge*. And they'll be arriving at more or less the same time, scrumming and rucking for shelf space as the spectacle of the real Rugby World Cup plays off.

The *Jonah Lomu Rugby Challenge* game is being produced by Sidhe Studios, responsible for previous *Rugby League* titles. The New Zealand based developer seems to have been a bit quiet since their last release in 2008, which was *Speed Racer* for the Nintendo platforms. But that doesn't mean too much.

Rugby Challenge is being punted as something of a definitive experience. It looks like every tournament under the sun will be playable here: 'Tri Nations, Bledisloe Cup, Super Rugby teams, Aviva Premiership Rugby, TOP 14 Orange, RaboDirect PRO12, ITM Cup, and Ranfurly Shield, amongst other licensed teams and competitions,' is what their website says. It also lists the All Blacks, Qantas Wallabies and USA Eagles as licensed teams.

On the other hand, *Rugby World Cup 2011* is being developed by HB Studios. You may not recognize the name, but this studio claims involvement in franchises like *FIFA* and *Madden* – yep, the EA games. They also worked on EA's ill-fates rugby and cricket franchises, which haven't seen releases for ages.

While the game will focus on the World Cup, with players aiming to lift the Webb Ellis trophy at the end of it, there are also tournaments, test matches, warm up and others that the player will be able to take part in. Whether these are licensed is unclear, but what we do know about licenses is that teams from England, South Africa, France, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and Italy have been signed for this title, with more to be added (according to the official website.) The All Blacks and Wallabies are a little conspicuous in their absence...

There are a few videos out of the games, but these days that's hardly a trusted source of information. What will really matter when it comes down to it is how these two titles perform in-game. Both have pros and cons, realistically speaking, so it will be a case of the proof being in the pudding.

There do, however, seem to be assumptions being made, if web-chatter is anything to pay attention to (and, realistically, it isn't, but anyway...) There's a bit of smack-talk going on, most notably directed at the *World Cup* title from fans of the *Rugby Challenge* game. What's ultimately interesting here is that they're claiming it's a better game, while not having actually played it. Perhaps *Rugby Challenge* included a time machine with their pre-orders.

Jokes aside, it is likely that we will see a rather stiff competition arising between these two games locally. We are rugby mad here, apparently (if all those silly Sharks stickers on Gauteng cars are anything to go by, as well as all those weird fake blue testicles hanging from virtually everything in Pretoria). So these two titles should see some hot action when it comes down to it.

Weighing these two titles up against each other is very tricky at this point, although we're willing to say that the *Rugby World Cup* title looks like it might have a bit of an edge, even just because of its name (and because of the fact that we really, really dislike Jonah Lomu here.) The claimed sports experience of the team behind it (claimed by them, EA isn't saying anything) may also add to the deal, but they did do all those previous EA *Rugby* titles, which were nasty. On the other hand, technology has come a long way since the last time we saw an EA *Rugby* title.

Rugby Challenge is being developed by a squad that we haven't seen much from at all, but realistically... the New Zealanders are also rugby-crazy, so that may go some way to improving their odds in terms of a good game experience.

There's quite a bit of one-upmanship going on with the local distributors of these games, too, but we're going to be pragmatic about this and reserve our judgement on these titles until we've seen them in action. The only thing we can commit to is that both games will have rugby balls in them. Which one will be the victor on the day will be clear once they've hit shelves. **NAG**

PS3 PlayStation3 PlayStation Network XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE PC DVD ROM Mac

fpb 13L

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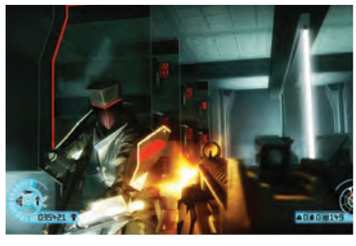
It's almost like this screenshots begs for a fart joke.

"You go into regions the United Nations can't, and shoot things."



Bodycount

Hello, have we met before?

[details]

Release Date:
Q4 2011
Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
First-person shooter
Developer:
Guildford Studio
Website:
www.bodycountgame.com
Publisher:
Codemasters

[trivia]

// Codemasters has been around as a developer/publisher since 1986.

// Codemasters produced unlicensed Nintendo games in 1989 by using a copy-protection glitch.

Before the... operation... *Bodycount* was known as *Bulletstorm*. But when *Bulletstorm* failed to make its pimp daddies People Can Fly and Epic Games any money, it needed to change. So it went under the knife, and transitioned from a combo-mechanic score-attack shooter to a shooter score-attack combo-mechanic game.

It probably still won't be enough. All kidding aside, the first time I saw *Bodycount* in person at this year's E3, I honestly thought well, *Bulletstorm* got here first, *Bodycount* is just sloppy seconds. I also wondered if they were going to improve the visuals at all, since it looked really drab. Then when Epic recently admitted that *Bulletstorm* didn't earn them a single cent, it made me wonder what chance *Bodycount* has. Codemasters hasn't displayed much confidence in the game so far.

Bodycount is considered a spiritual successor to the rambunctious first-person shooter *Black* from the PlayStation 2, on account of it being developed by the same team. For all its faults (enemies were bullet-sponges, the levels were kind of boring and the plot flavourless), Black was a gungasm with real punch – the first of its kind, really. The lineage in *Bodycount* is clearly visible and audible: loud, meaty guns and a destructible environment, undercut only by every other game now doing the same thing. The plotline unfortunately doesn't seem much improved either. You play Jackson, a former American soldier now in the employ of the enigmatic organization "The Network". You go into regions the United Nations can't, and shoot things.

As you get kills, bright glowing baubles drop from enemies, which charge a power-up bar that lets you call in airstrikes, heal or do double damage. There's a decent cover system which lets you fire out from all angles. The environments range from grimy third-world shanty towns to high-tech *Tron* light-scape corridors filled with oddly polygonal armoured enemies.

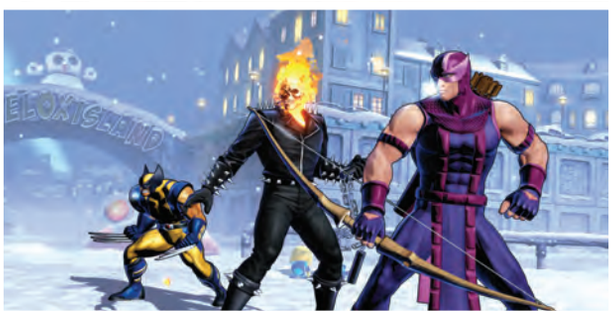
The comparison to *Bulletstorm* is less about theme or foot-play (*Bodycount* has no kick), and more about rapidly stringing together kills for a benefit. In this case, the benefit is tangible and functional, but in essence the two games are more alike than not: set-piece shooters designed around a central gimmick. That being said, I'm not sure if there is a place for *Bodycount* in today's oversaturated first-person market, especially not with its run-of-the-mill visuals and me-too gameplay. The environmental destruction is nice, but lacks oomph in light of things like *Battlefield 3*.

As if checking off boxes, multiplayer will have team deathmatch, and online co-op is confirmed. I've no doubt that someone out there will find *Bodycount* matches their exacting tastes, but like *Bulletstorm*, I doubt it'll be enough to make it worth the developer's while. **NAG**

Miktar

Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3

Still going for that ride



[details]

Release Date:
Q4 2011
Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
Fighting
Developer:
Capcom
Website:
marvelvscapcom3.com/us/
Publisher:
Capcom

[trivia]

// If you're sour from losing, you may be 'salty'.

// If you win using cheap gimmicks, you're a scrub.

The Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan, along with poor sales of the Shuma-Gorath and Jill Valentine DLC, caused complications for Capcom. As a result, they refocused their existing *MvC3* DLC plans into a more full-featured discounted retail expansion.

Basic upgrades include an overhauled interface for character and stage select, as well as the in-game HUD. The existing 36 character roster has been tweaked and rebalanced based on community feedback, but the biggest changes are to X-Factor and Aerial Exchange.

X-Factor now has a shorter duration and lower damage boost, but can be triggered in the air. During Aerial Exchange, the three directions now cause a unique colour flash, removing luck from guessing the right counter input. Each of the three colours / types of aerial exchange now performs a specialised role: juggle upwards for a longer combo, gain hyper meter on success, or drain hyper meter from the opponent on success.

The 12 roster additions, 6 to a side, include Doctor Strange, Ghost Rider, Hawkeye, Iron Fist, Nova and Rocket Raccoon for Marvel, and Firebrand, Frank West, Nemesis, Phoenix Wright, Strider Hiryu and Vergil for Capcom.

Capcom has promised improved net code, and a spectator mode that lets you watch live matches between players. It's estimated that the expansion will retail at half the regular game price ($30 or R200). NAG

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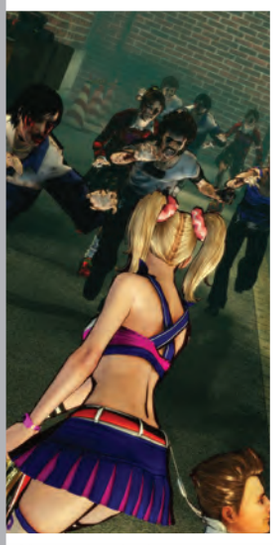

Lollipop Chainsaw

This is going to be awkward to masturbate to...

[details]

Release Date:
2012
Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
Action
Developer:
Grasshopper Manufacture
Website:
us.lollipopchainsaw.com
Publisher:
Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment

[trivia]

// Grasshopper is responsible for the head-trip *Killer7*.

// CEO Goichi Suda (Suda51) worked as an undertaker before getting into gaming.

Instead of exploding into blood and guts, zombies detonate into pink neon lights and hearts. The lead character is an 18 year old cheerleader. Her chainsaw is pink, because that's her favourite colour. The zombies are led by a group of zombie rock and roll lords. She carries the disembodied head of her boyfriend attached to her belt. The game takes place at San Romero High School in California. The chainsaw is, naturally, upgradeable.

If Juliet Starling had been some beefy dude with swords on the ends of chains, nobody would have noticed. But flash some pink panties as Juliet does her stylish acrobatic leaps and jumps, killing zombies as she goes, and suddenly no sir, *that is not okay* – according to Mr Super Serious Gamer anyway. Good thing Grasshopper Manufacture, headed by the enigmatic Suda51, cares not for Super Serious Gamer and his dumb complaints. *No More Heroes* was proof enough.

"Actually I've wanted to do a crazy horror-action game like this set in a school for a while now," Suda commented, "something where the classrooms, corridors, gymnasium and so on are suddenly transformed into something completely different. I was also working on a game concept centred around using a chainsaw as a weapon, and once the idea for the Juliet character began to form, it was just a perfect fit."

Being a cheerleader, all of Juliet's action moves take advantage of her cheerleading skills. Cartwheels, cheers, chants, flips and... Okay, some of her moves are way beyond the scope of cheerleading, but they're thematically appropriate. There will be more ways to attack than just the chainsaw, and "part of the fun will be figuring out which move to use at which time." There's been no word yet on just why exactly Juliet has the (living) head of her boyfriend dangling from her belt like a friendship charm. Decapitated heads are a reoccurring theme in Grasshopper games though, if you recall Susie from *Killer7*.

Like with most Grasshopper games, musician Akira Yamaoka provides the groove. "Part of the reason we established Grasshopper in the first place was so we could work on every part of a game in-house, and we treat sound especially importantly in this outfit." says Suda, "... they're working on a whole array of pop tunes right now. Part of the gameplay might involve sound as well, although exactly how we're still keeping a secret."

The game is nearly 70% complete according to Suda. If it maintains a good combat system that feels right and is fun to play, all that's left is for Suda to bring his trademark head-screw writing to the plot and perhaps this will be the one to make it to the mainstream. **NAG**

Miktar

Don't you wish your girlfriend...

"Being a cheerleader, all of Juliet's action moves take advantage of her cheerleading skills."

Ninja Gaiden III

Gaiden, Gaiden, Gaiden

[details]

Release Date:
Q1 2012
Platforms:
360 / PS3 / Wii U
Genre:
Action adventure
Developer:
Team Ninja
Website:
teamninja-studio.com/ng3/eu/
Publisher:
Tecmo Koei

[trivia]

// The first ever *Ninja Gaiden* was released in arcades and on the NES in 1988.

// Ryu may look human, but due to ancestry he's actually part fiend.

"Ryu is unmasking himself, and it's a way of attracting people to his world." says project leader Yosuke Hayashi, pointing to the *Ninja Gaiden III* poster nearby. "We are trying to have people enter the real Ryu Hayabusa. The amount of blood doesn't revolve around the idea of killing people either; it could also be Ryu's blood. We're focusing not only on cutting people but also Ryu himself."

The *Gaiden* games attract a very strange sort. This will be the first modern *Gaiden* with no involvement from original producer Tomonobu Itagaki, who left Team Ninja after *Gaiden II* due to a kerfuffle with Tecmo over royalties and bonuses.

Gaiden III will retain its trademark series difficulty. An off-side remark promises competitive and cooperative multiplayer modes for up to eight people, but little elaboration is given. According to Hayashi, *Gaiden III* will explore Ryu's more human side has he fights through a hellish realm, with events centred on the Sword of the Archfiend from *Gaiden II*. Ryu's right arm is cursed, which accounts for some of the changes to the combat system.

In the E3 demo, Ryu is approached by the Japanese Self-Defense Force to help with a terrorist problem in London. He jets over, slices the bad guys and gets into a skirmish with a mysterious hooded opponent. Using his new Kunai Climb, Ryu can mount certain walls and attack enemies from above. Time it right without being seen, and it's a one-hit instant-kill. Enemies are smarter and shout out commands like "surround him" and "get backup". Enemy decapitation and dismemberment is gone. Instead, they scream in pain as they die, acting like big drama-queens about it.

The dash move from *Gaiden II* has been replaced with a functional slide, letting you nip through small passages, duck between enemies or attack them from a distance. The screen-clearing Ultimate Technique now requires you kill a certain amount of enemies first, until Ryu's arm glows red. Only then can you charge up an Ultimate Attack, which will absorb nearby dead bodies for power.

Other changes include an active HUD which now fades out when no enemies are around, and the removal of the Muramasa Store and Statues for buying stuff. Instead, Ryu's weapons will be upgraded over time. The Dragon Statues for saving and healing are gone, replaced with a falcon that flies in and lands on Ryu's good arm at specific points of the mission.

The Wii U version will apparently have optional touchscreen controls similar to *Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword*. A strange move really, since *Dragon Sword*'s touch-screen controls worked because the game was built around it to compensate for the lack of decent action-gameplay controls on the DS. **NAG**

Miktar

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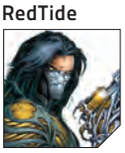
The reviewers

Question: What was your worst gaming experience this winter?

RedTide



Seeing *The Darkness 2* at E3.

Miktar

This year's E3: while it had a few gems, overall it was a big disappointment of lame uninspired titles.

Azimuth

Saturday, 30 July, 01:32. I ran out of whiskey in the middle of a *Halo* match.

Mikit0707

Duke Nukem Forever. Or did that come out in autumn? Whatever. I don't care. I hated every second of my time with it.

GeometriX

A power cut killed my late night ownage in *Team Fortress 2,* courtesy of the jerks who leave their heaters on all night.

Barkskin

Not having Internet for two months. That. Was. Horrible. Made the nights seem colder.

Ramjet

My Xbox 360's optical drive seizing up, forcing me to buy a new one.

SAVAGE

Getting cannon rushed… any season.

ShockG

I didn't play any games.

Anatomy of a review

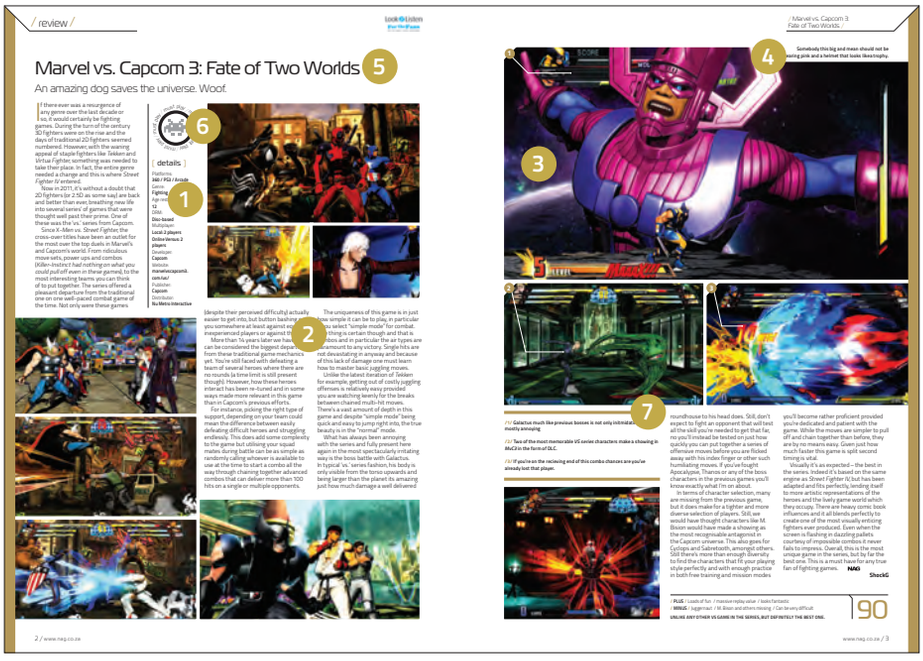
A quick guide to the NAG reviews section

/1/ Totally interesting stuff: Developer, publisher, platform, random junk and more. The number of players listed under multiplayer is the maximum number you can have in a game at one time. Local means "couch", not LAN.

/2/ Obligatory words (i.e. a review): This is the stuff you probably won't read before ogling the shiny pictures, glancing at the score and then flipping the page. We don't blame you – word-reading is hard.

/3/ Screenshots: These are the pretty pictures you'll probably stare at before peeking at the score, ignoring the wonderful review and then flipping the page. You should probably ask your mom to make your sandwiches too. Just to be on the safe side. You might cut yourself.

/4/ Captions: Funny. Informative. Touching. The captions are usually none of these things. Except maybe touching, when we put some innuendo in there.


/ review /

Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds 5

An amazing dog saves the universe. Woof.

6

details

1

2

3

4

7

90

/ Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds /

2 / www.nag.co.za

www.nag.co.za / 3

/5/ Game name: The most reading you'll do will likely happen in this bit right here.

/6/ Award: Comes in three delicious flavours. See below for maximum info.

/7/ Those things with extra info: These things have extra info.

THE AWARDS

Editor's Choice: If a game gets this award, you know it's more than just good. It means it pulled the editor away from *Call of Duty* for long enough to actually play another game – and we can't think of anything more remarkable than that.

Must Play: It means exactly what it says: you must play this game. Beg your parents for cash, dole out sexual favours, etc. – fight past the pain and do whatever it takes to get your sweaty paws on it. You'll thank us for it later.

Pony: You know how everyone wants a pony? Yeah, that's not the case here and we're not just being mean. We're trying to protect you from the horror of being punched in the nether regions by thoroughly rubbish games.

THE SCORE BOX

/1/ Plus: These are the great things that make us happy.

/2/ Minus: These are the rubbish things that make us sad.

/3/ Bottom line: The waffle stops here. Hundreds of words distilled into a tiny bit of text that can either damn a game to the depths or shower it with praise.

/4/ The Score: It's a number out of 100. It lets you make an informed decision as to whether or not you should spend money on this game. This isn't rocket science, people.

1 / **PLUS** / Very detailed / Enthralling setting / Amazing graphics

2 / **MINUS** / Not enough detail / Boring setting / Rubbish graphics

BOTTOM LINE GOES HERE; KEEP IT UNDER 15 WORDS, 15 WOULD BE IDEAL. THANKS. 3

4 69

QUICK HITS

Demolition Company

Any game that lets you smash things into pieces gains instant brownie points just for including that feature, but what about a game that's only about smashing things? As it turns out, it's not a terrible idea, and *Demolition Company* is bizarrely entertaining.

Unsurprisingly, this is a game about a demolition company. You'll play as the only member of said company (*Demolition Sole Proprietorship* wasn't as catchy), and you'll be given assignments in several locations of a city to demolish certain structures and clear away the debris using a variety of accurately-modelled demolition equipment, both hand-held and vehicular. Aside from the modelling and textures of the vehicles, everything in the game is ugly. These are visuals that would have been frowned upon when 3D games first hit the market. Graphics isn't really a big deal here, however, and if you can look past what you'd consider to be the minimum a game must deliver to be called as much, you'll find that the core gameplay elements of *Demolition Company* are entertaining and well put-together, if a little uninspired.

// **It's not as bad as you think.**

Traffic Manager

It's difficult to imagine that the lead designer of *Traffic Manager* woke up one day and thought "gosh, I'd love to make a game in which the player manages traffic in a city," but the scary truth is that this probably happened. But who are we to question peoples' dreams? As it so happens, *Traffic Manager* is another game from Excalibur Publishing that isn't terrible. Don't get ahead of yourself – it's not "good," at least not in the sense that we'd use it to describe modern videogames that are actually fun to play. No, *Traffic Manager* is "good" in the sense that it delivers exactly what it sets out to offer.

The visuals are bland, the tutorials are awful and do very little to explain what is, in fact, a very complex game, but the core mechanics are well delivered. If you've ever been curious about your ability to manage the flow of traffic with traffic lights, street signs, roadworks, public transport and other super interesting factors in this field, then you probably won't be disappointed with this game.

// **Boring and complex, which is probably what real traffic management is like.**

WEB SCORES

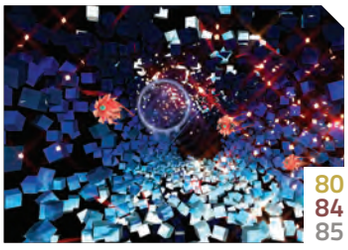
How do we measure up? We scour the 'Net to find out what the rest of the world thinks.

NAG / Metacritic average / Game Rankings average

Call of Juarez: The Cartel

67
47
50

Child of Eden

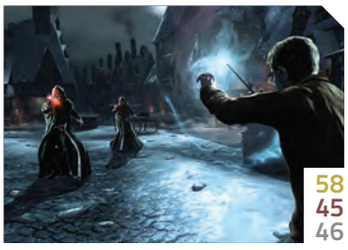


80
84
85

From Dust

89
80
80

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2



58
45
46

Shadows of the Damned

86
77
80

Transformers: Dark of the Moon

70
58
65

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Shadows of the Damned

Magnifico

Garcia F--king Hotspur. This fiery antihero has just watched his beloved girlfriend Paula be killed, then dragged down to the underworld because of what he does. What he does is kill demons, and he's very, very good at it. His talents have caught the attention of the Lord of the Underworld, a despicable prick named Fleming who's not particularly happy that Garcia has been culling heaps of his minions with reckless aplomb. So he murders Paula's face and kidnaps her (in that order) before hauling her down to his hellish theme park so he can delight in killing her again. And again. And again. All in the name of killing Garcia's buzz. But this is Garcia F--king Hotspur, the Mexican Dante Alighieri, who unflinchingly follows the Lord of the Underworld into his despicable abode to rescue his one true love – and so begins *Shadows of the Damned.*

You've got to hand it to EA. They've published two game-length d1ck jokes in one year: the first being Epic's *Bulletstorm* and now *Shadows*. That takes giant balls, and what's more surprising is that they're both fantastic games. At first glance, *Shadows* may appear to be just another third-person shooter, albeit one with the names of two incredibly influential Japanese developers pinned onto it. The first few hours of the game may lead you to believe that you're merely playing a dreary blast-'em-up wearing a macabre dress made of meat. However, as it was with *Bulletstorm, Shadows* is anything but a mindless, dull shooter. There's indubitable intelligence in its design. Creativity flows from it like pus from a festering wound, and it's every bit as foul (but in an unexpectedly good way). The (admittedly basic) story is presented in exceedingly clever ways to mask its simplicity. All the superfluous details are peculiarly well written and the game's script offers fleeting glimpses into the minds of fun-loving madmen. Each demonic boss battle, for example, is preceded by the discovery of a tome containing a short story that details the wicked mortal lives that preceded their long descent into the underworld. These short stories are read aloud by either your multipurpose sidekick Johnson (a floating, sentient demon skull who acts as everything from your torch to your weird array of weaponry) or Garcia himself, complete with LOL-worthy commentary from the duo. It's the little touches like these that make *Shadows* special: things like Garcia's tenuous ability to read English, or his hilarious intermittent justifications for loving Paula as much as he does, or even a sudden switch from third-person shooter to hand-drawn, side-scrolling shoot-'em-up without so much as a moment's notice. Every level brings completely unexpected, marvellously unhinged tertiary delights that make the entire experience compelling, driving you towards that grotesque finish line with ever-increasing fervour as you slowly come to realise that you're infatuated with this damn game.

BUT! I'm getting ahead of myself here. When *Shadows* isn't being totally bonkers, it's a solid, tight third-person shooter, more *Resident Evil 4/5* than

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
Third-person shooter
Age restriction:
18+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Grasshopper Manufacture
Website:
www.ea.com/shadows-of-the-damned
Publisher:
Electronic Arts
Distributor:
Electronic Arts

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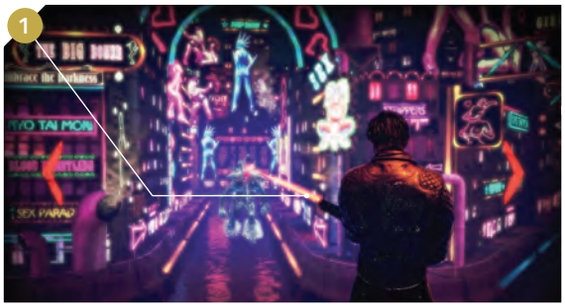
Look & Listen
For the Fans

/1/ If you're wondering what sort of humour *Shadows* is brimming with, this weapon should provide all the answers. It's called the Big Boner, and you activate it by getting Johnson mightily aroused. This isn't a family show.

/2/ The boss battles aren't particularly difficult, but they're definitely memorable. Look – it's a goat riding a horse!

/3/ When Johnson isn't being a shoot-y thing of some kind, he's being a demon torch. Use it to bash enemies, like these Darkness-covered prats. Added bonus: torch bashing removes Darkness.

/4/ The game revels in its madness. It clearly wants you to have as much fun playing it as its developers had making it.



Gears of War. Demons appear in various incarnations, and you shoot and bash them using the mad arsenal of weaponry that Johnson is able to transform into until they fall over. Challenge comes when Darkness is thrown into the mix. This shadowy veil frequently appears in the underworld, blanketing enemies in its sticky, wet-looking protection and gradually pecking away at Garcia's health bar until you manage to eliminate the source. That's done in a number of ways. You could shoot a distressed Goat Head Lamp with your Light Shot, thereby igniting/calming it and bathing the area in light. You could ram Johnson into a Darkness Hand to plug the flow of Darkness that erupts from it. It could even be as rudimentary as ridding an area of all enemies. Regardless of the solution, it makes scuffles fairly interesting: especially when you consider that certain puzzles can only be completed in Darkness, forcing you to juggle your own health with the desire for progression. Along the way you pick up White, Red and Blue Gems. White is used as currency for purchasing alcohol (which restores health) from vending machines, or buying ammo, booze and Red Gems from Christopher – a half-human, half-demon, all-weird travelling merchant. Red Gems are exchanged for upgrading your weapons, health and more. Blue Gems are dropped by defeated bosses and slotted into Johnson, unlocking new weapons and new ways to frag things. Each of the game's chapters brings with it a set of brilliant, imaginative boss battles. The game's not scary, but it's certainly creepy – the demented environment/enemy design makes the entire trip through this oddly cheerful underworld unsettling. Even the colour palette is... well, it's a bit strange. It's peppered with random gameplay gimmicks, like a sudden dose of ten-demon bowling. Thankfully, they're never overused, instead employing them as quick, hit and run attacks on your sense of humour. There's more to *Shadows* than all that, but it is better if I leave it to you to discover.

It's not all fun and games though. Despite its playful approach to game design and wacky gameplay experimentation, *Shadows*' core mechanics (i.e. the shooter bits) eventually begin to suffer from repetition – but that's not even its greatest flaw. Its most glaring stumbling block lies in the fact that I cannot recommend this game to everyone. The humour will be too juvenile, too brash for many, and not everyone will appreciate the game's inherent eccentricity. The gunplay is solid, but there's enough reliance on puzzles and bullet-less gameplay to annoy your average shooter fan. As much as I want to heartily recommend this game to anyone who will listen, I can't rightly do that. That's why you'll find no Must Play award on these pages. It's too much of an oddball, one that you'll either love or hate. The people out there who'll enjoy this game for what it is have probably already bought it, loved it and built a shrine in its honour. Everyone else should consider carefully before handing over the dough. **NAG**
Barkskin

/ **PLUS** / Gameplay variety / Meaty combat / Memorable boss battles / Awesomely puerile
/ **MINUS** / Definitely not everyone's cup of vomit / Gets repetitive

IT'S BRASH. IT'S LUDICROUS. IT'S COMPLETELY INSANE. IT'S DECEPTIVELY INTELLIGENT – BUT IT'S NOT FOR EVERYONE.

86

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Call of Juarez: The Cartel

The wild waste

Cowboys are cool. They spit a lot, and carry guns, and call each other things like 'pilgrim' and 'pardner'. They're dirty, they aren't scared of snakes, and they know many women of ill repute. These are just a few reasons why cowboys are cool, of course – there are many others. But there is a proviso to their level of cool… they need to be in the Wild West to qualify. Put them in a modern setting, and those fancy boots and big hats make them look like wannabes.

The same, sadly, can be said for the latest *Call of Juarez* game, and for pretty much the same reason. See, when the first two titles came out, they were set in the lawless days when the word 'frontier' had meaning to Americans. This third title, *The Cartel*, is set in modern day Los Angeles and a few surrounding areas. And, just like a modern day cowboy wannabe, this one lacks true grit (see what I did there?) [*Stuff like that gets you close to that increase, Ed*]

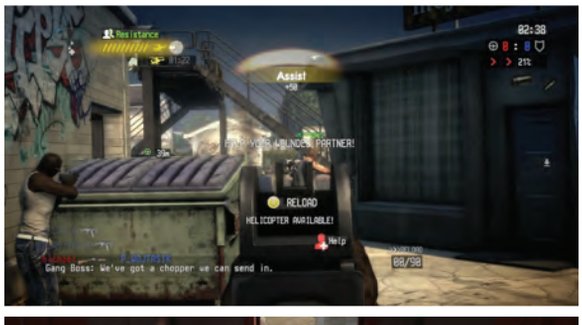
[details]

Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
First-person shooter
Age restriction:
18+
DRM:
Disc-based
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 12 players
Developer:
Techland
Website:
www.callofjuarez.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
Megarom

In *Call of Juarez: The Cartel*, the player takes on the role of one of three characters: Kim Evans, a sassy FBI agent; Eddie Guerra, a street-smart DEA operative; or Ben McCall, a Bible-quoting bad-ass who works for the LAPD. If the name 'McCall' rings a bell with those who played the previous games, it's because he is the descendant of Ray McCall, the gun-slinging preacher who appeared in the first two titles. The name of the bad guys might ring a bell too: the Mendoza Cartel… Juan Mendoza was the villain in both of the other games.

The three protagonists are thrown together to investigate the cartel when it starts becoming a major threat. But each character has a different agenda. They also each have different strengths and weaknesses, and all three are playable in the single-player campaign. This means you could play it through three times – if you wanted to. But the extremely repetitive nature of the gun play may not be something you'll want to sit through again and again.

The different agendas do lead to an interesting idea in multiplayer. Each character has 'sub-quests' and hidden objects they can find during almost every mission. But they need to do so without the other characters (or better yet, players) seeing them. This makes for an interesting dynamic, because the multiplayer is built around co-



/1/ **Mexican stand-off:** ***(Noun),*** **informal: Sometimes offensive. A stalemate or impasse; a confrontation that neither side can win.** *www.dictionary.com*

operative team-work.

And that could be another place where your experience falls flat. Playing with other players can be great, if they stick to the general plan. But if you team up with a bunch of clods that are going to run around doing their own thing, you won't get very far. The agendas aside, this game actually makes for a better single-player experience – the AI never gets shot, is pretty effective at aerating bad guys, and will provide you with prompts and tactical support (which works okay for the most part.) Every now and then they will get in your way, or they might teleport to a position in front of you, but that's fairly forgivable. They're also quite easy to fool when it comes to those sub-quests.

Ultimately, *Call of Juarez: The Cartel* is disappointing. The characters are lifeless stereotypes, parodies of real people one might expect in a low-budget movie. They're unlikeable and clichéd and also foul mouthed and constantly issue inane prattle instead of dialogue that might actually give them some depth.

The same counts for the levels. They're quite unimaginative, and the game dynamic boils down to repeatedly performing the same type of actions – shooting people. There is a time slowing thing available, but it doesn't knock any kind of footwear off of anyone. The guns are cool – there are a fair number of them in the game – but they don't mitigate the monotonous experience (or the occasionally poor hit detection.) There are a few driving challenges as well, but instead of adding a bit of variety, these generally easy, mostly bland affairs just make things worse.

Graphically, the game feels a bit dated. Combined with the bad dialogue (which is acted fairly well, we must say) and the whole presentation feels like it is a few years old, rather than a 'cutting edge game'. That's sad, really.

In fact, the whole thing is a bit sad. Techland had, in the form of this franchise, something that was fairly unique, generally exciting and pretty enjoyable. But then they had to go change the setting – and lose the plot along the way. *Call of Juarez: The Cartel* isn't going to do much for a gamer wanting a good, high action shooter. Yes, there's lots of action, but it is missing the spark and feel that make shooters great. It feels pedestrian and forced, rather than flowing along, and a lot of what one encounters in the game is either meant as shock value, or is meant to be cool. But it's that forced feeling cool designed by someone who wouldn't know cool if it cold-cocked them with a Christmas ham. You may be able to draw some enjoyment out of this title but, realistically, it is more of a lacklustre stop-gap than a thrilling game. It is a wasted opportunity that could have been so much more than it actually is. **NAG**

Ramjet

/ **PLUS** / Lots of guns / Three playable characters
/ **MINUS** / Repetitive / Feels dated

A DISAPPOINTING THIRD INSTALMENT IN THE FRANCHISE, THIS ONE COULD HAVE BENEFITTED FROM MORE TLC.

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

From Dust

Respect nature or it'll pwn you.

In an instant, you realise that the wall of dirt you made to defend the village from the flow of lava heading towards it won't be enough. Nor is the trench you dug to protect it from floodwaters. In a clash of heat and liquid, the village is drowning *and on fire*. *From Dust* is made up of moments. Each moment is usually followed by much disaster. Occasionally, the broad strokes you make with your ability to lift and dump sand, water and lava, comes through. A deft bridge here, a bulwark against water there, and what might have been defeat turns into defiance against the awesome power of the raging elements.

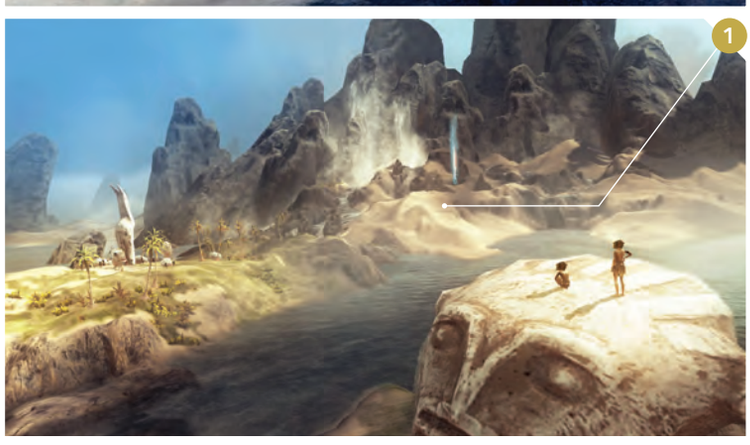
At its core, *From Dust* takes inspiration from older god games like *Populous*, but forgoes the base-building and unit-training in favour of a more puzzle-like approach. The campaign is a series of missions strung together by the goal of reaching the portal on each map. To activate the portal, you must control all the village totems by bringing enough of your tribe to them. What gets in your way, is nature herself. Tsunamis hit like a wall of water, volcanoes spew lakes of fire, floodplains fill with water more rapidly than you'd expect. Each map is its own scenario, a puzzle to figure out how to survive.

To aid you, certain village totems contain powers. One lets you turn water into jelly for a while, letting you scoop it up and carve it out to make a path. The effect is temporary though. Another lets you dump infinite amounts of sand for a while. Discovering the powers is part of the fun, so no spoilers here. Some missions contain protection prayers, which a villager must reach and then take back to your village (trailing behind him like a kite). These will propagate to other villages automatically, provided the runner can reach them. Once a village has protection against water, for example, not even a mighty tsunami can destroy it. The villagers will dance and chant, the water impacting an invisible shield. It's quite a sight.

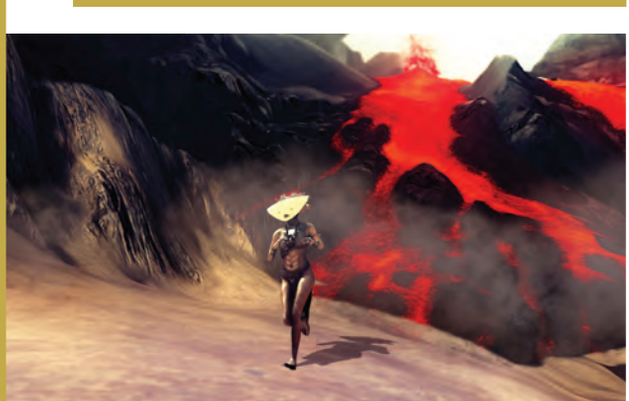
Flora will grow where it can. If it covers enough of the map, more story elements appear (in the form of narrative items you can read on a submenu), and you might unlock additional challenge maps. These are pure puzzle maps, often requiring quick thinking and quicker fingers. The only problem with flora is it catches fire. Wildfires are deadly and difficult to stop once they get going.

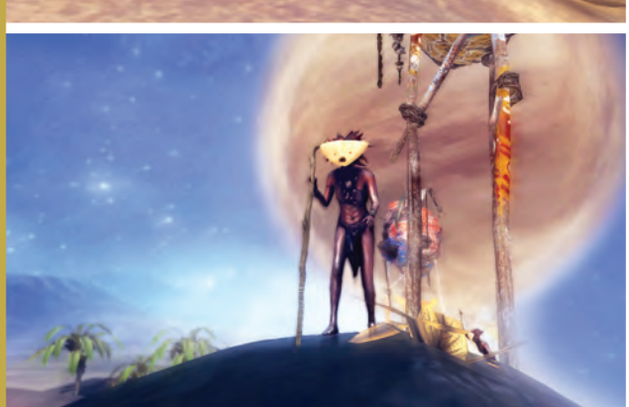
It's a fantastic demonstration of what fluid dynamics can do for gaming. If you're so inclined, it's also a passionate spiritual journey through a strange world made familiar only by how the various natural systems interact. If all else fails, you still have a good puzzle game with a unique twist. **NAG**

Miktar



/1/ **Their paradise, your playground. The result of that combination is up to you: mayhem or perfection.**





must play / must play / must play / must play /

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
God game / sandbox puzzler
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
Internet connection required [Steam]
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Ubisoft Montpellier
Website:
fromdustgame.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
XBLA / Steam / PSN

/ **PLUS** / Refreshingly unique experience / Strangely relaxing to play / Beautiful to look at
/ **MINUS** / Short campaign / No level editor / No multiplayer / Slightly buggy sound

SO FEW GAMES TACKLE THE EMERGENT PROPERTIES OF NATURE DUE TO THEIR COMPLEXITY. *FROM DUST* NAILS IT.

89

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Child of Eden

A real trip

If you played (and liked) *Rez* or *Lumines*, then *Child of Eden* is something you may well want to take a look at – because the same guy is behind all three games. Just like the previous two, *Child of Eden* is a trippy journey into sight and sound, with the user able to influence the sights and sounds of the game purely by playing it.

The story is really inconsequential to the title, but we'll explain it anyway – in the far future, the consciousness of the first person born in space – a girl called Lumi – is recreated in the massive Internet (now called Eden). This affords many people the opportunity to have their only contact with Earth, but when a virus threatens Eden, a new consciousness – the player – is created to try and save it.

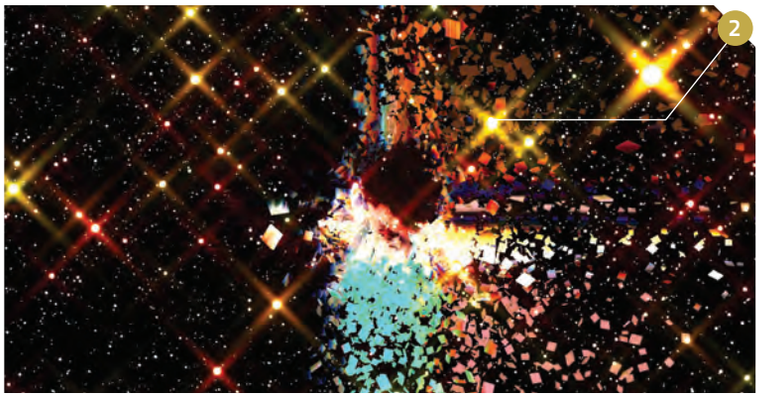
Pretty simple, just like the game and it's not really complex to play, although it does get challenging. There's a fair amount of grinding to do, but those that enjoy this title will certainly not mind replaying the levels over and over again. And, if they have access to a Kinect system, even better – the physicality of that makes the game an even more psychedelic experience.

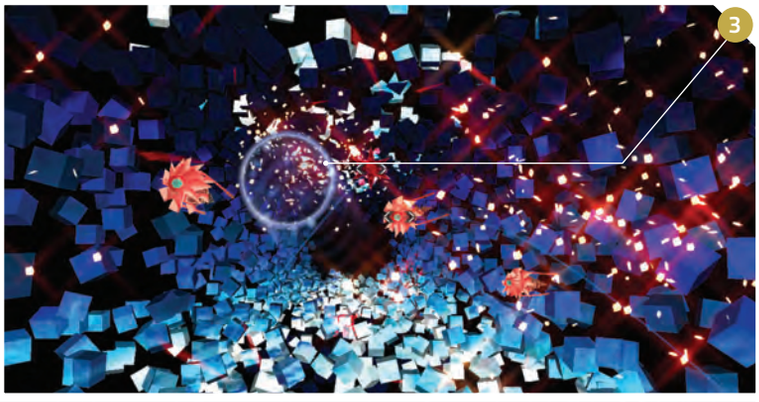
It's certainly not everyone's cup of tea, but if your gaming horizons are broader than "lots of guns" you may well enjoy this unique and original title.

NAG
Ramjet

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
Rhythm / shooter
Age restriction:
7+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Q Entertainment
Website:
www.child-of-eden.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Distributor:
Megarom

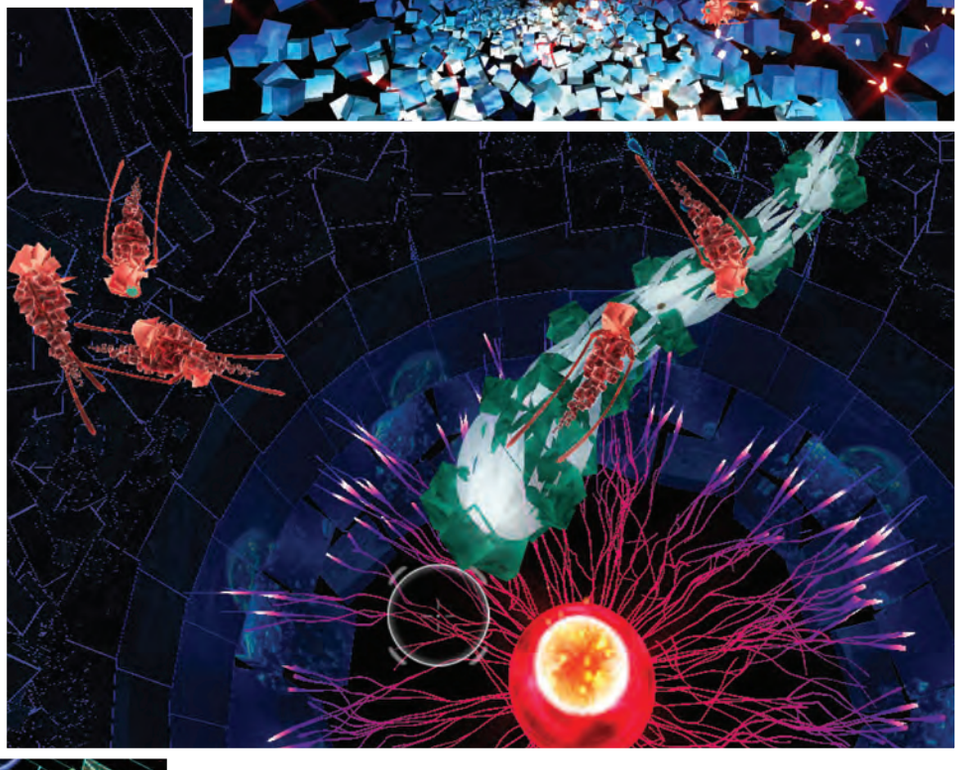




/1/ Ooo, shiny!

/2/ Ooo, sparkly!

/3/ Ooo, shiny and sparkly!



/ PLUS / Unique / Lots of fun
/ MINUS / Not for everyone / Some grinding

THIS UNIQUE TITLE ALMOST DEFIES DESCRIPTION – IT REALLY IS ORIGINAL.

80

Look & Listen
For the Fans

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2

Bye, Harry...

[details]

Platforms:
360 / DS / PC / PS3 Wii / Kitchen sink
Genre:
Action adventure
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
Disc-based
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
EA Bright Light
Website:
www.harrypotter.ea.com
Publisher:
Electronic Arts
Distributor:
EA South Africa

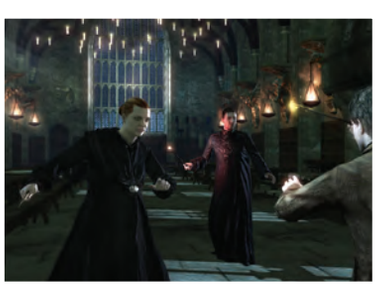
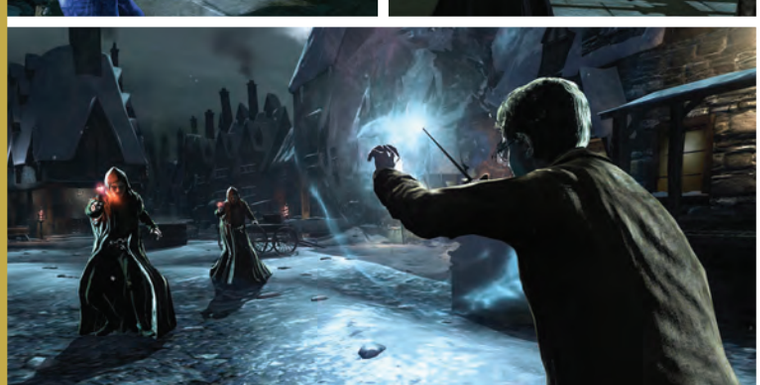
Here's the *Harry Potter* franchise pecking order: the books are awesome, the movies are mediocre, and the games... well, I'll be nice by saying they're on the bottom rung. That all said and done this latest title does do a lot better than the previous ones. Okay, maybe not that big a compliment, but still.

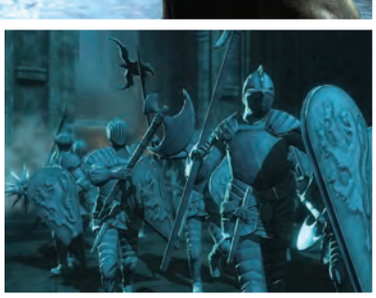
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2 follows the same track that Part 1 took on – it's a cover-based third-person shooter – but it does a better job than the horribly disappointing previous game. Not a lot better, mind you, but in this instalment things just feel a little better.

All the combat is wand based, of course, but the player will be able to sport more traditional weapons in their spell forms; the sniper spell, the machine gun spell, the rocket launcher spell, and so on. Other abilities include a protective spell and the ability to Apparate (that's teleport in non-Potter speak) but this last ability only enters the game very late.

The game is extremely linear and totally predictable, leading the player from one set of obvious cover (with its associated waves of enemies) to the next. The graphics are a bit poor, too, except for the rather nice spell effects. In short, it's a slightly disappointing end to a lamentable game series. NAG

Ramjet



/ **PLUS** / Improved / It's the last one!
/ **MINUS** / Linear / Repetitive

IT'S A BIT BETTER THAN THE PREVIOUS GAME, BUT THAT'S NOT SAYING A LOT...

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Transformers: Dark of the Moon

The third form

Ah, yes, new movie, new movie game. But the latest *Transformers* game is seriously scuppered by the fact that the developers released an interstitial title in the form of *Transformers: War for Cybertron*. If that hadn't happened, *Dark of the Moon* would have been the best *Transformers* game yet. But it did happen, and *Dark of the Moon* suffers for it.

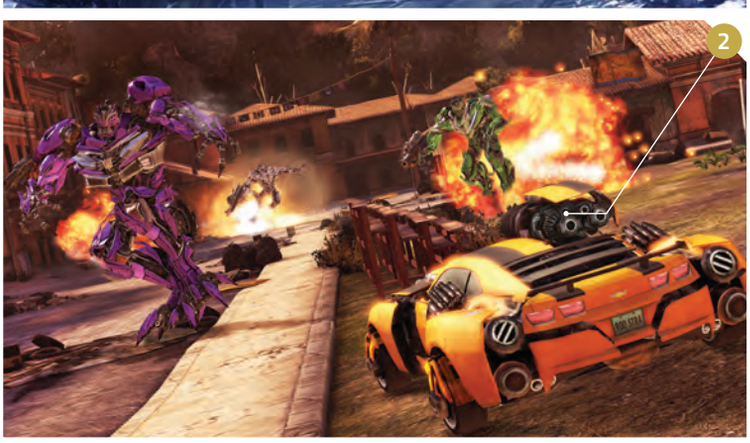
Once again, the player takes on the role of one of those cool Autobot giant robots that turns into snazzy vehicles. This time around, though, there is a third form, called Stealth Mode. It looks a lot like the vehicle form, except with a lot of guns tacked on. In this mode, the player presents a smaller target, is much tougher and doesn't need to reload weapons. It all sounds cool, but the player will spend the majority of their time in this mode, avoiding the weaker robot and vehicle forms. Not really in the spirit of things, now is it?

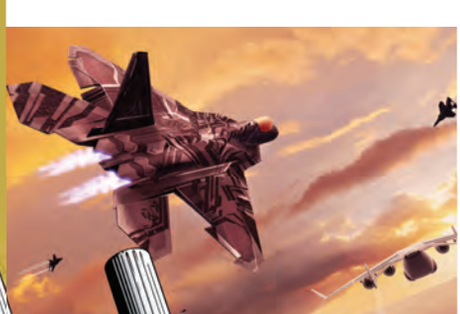
With unimaginative level design, a linear story and awful dialogue, this game just doesn't live up to what we saw in *War for Cybertron*. The multiplayer is decent, the graphics are good, and the short single player campaign is fun, but it just isn't as good as the previous title. **NAG**

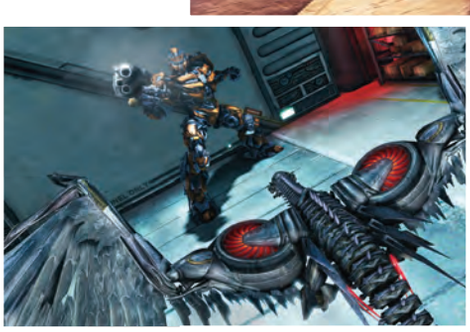
Ramjet

[details]

Platforms:
360 / 3DS / DS
PS3 / Wii
Genre:
Action adventure
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 10 players
Developer:
High Moon Studios
Website:
www.transformersgame.com
Publisher:
Megarom
Distributor:
Megarom

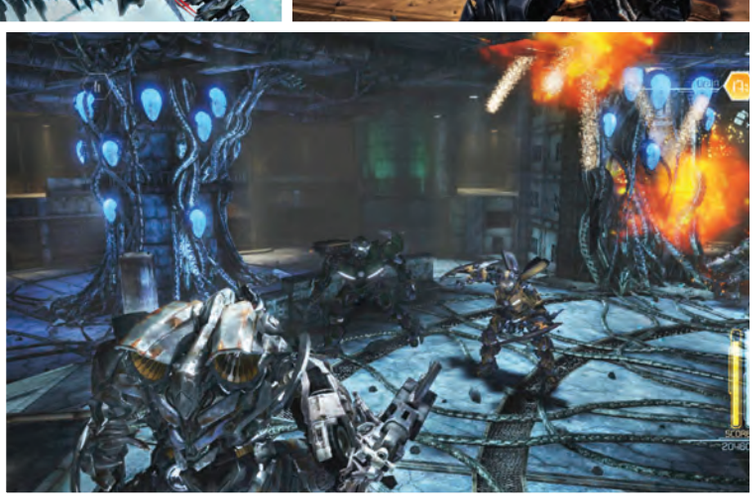






/1/ It's a pity that after the awesomeness that was War for Cybertron, Dark of the Moon does nothing but punch our perception of licensed games in the face. For shame Activision... For shame!

/2/ Stealth Force in action. Part vehicle, part robot - all weapon.



/ PLUS / Cool new mode / Good graphics
/ MINUS / Linear / Awful dialogue

ALTHOUGH IT'S NOT TERRIBLE, IT DOESN'T LIVE UP TO *WAR FOR CYBERTRON*.

70

Look & Listen
For the Fans

The Sims 3: Generations

Midlife crisis

[details]

Platforms:
PC
Genre:
Simulation
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
Disc-based
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
EA Sims Studio
Website:
www.thesims3.com
Publisher:
Electronic Arts
Distributor:
EA South Africa

What, another *Sims 3* expansion? Well, yes. What were you expecting? It's a business model built on the rabid fans of this franchise lapping up anything and everything the developers throw at them.

This expansion pack is the first for the *Sims 3* that could be called 'non-essential'. See, while the others that have been released did a lot to adjust the way the game works, this one adds a few elements, without changing the overall dynamic. That's not really a good thing, because it amounts to being little more than a Stuff pack.

The *Sims 3: Generations* allows for more interactions to take place during the various stages of the Sims' lives, but that's about it for freshness. Apart from that it adds new items, of course, as well as a couple of new ideas like Facebook integration.

Die-hard fans of the series will likely want to own *Generations*, but they shouldn't expect the same level of game improvements they got in previous expansions. They just aren't there.

Still, expanding on the things you can do with your Sims – even in small ways, like *Generations* does – is never a bad thing, particularly if you're a big fan of the virtual people game. And if you don't expect too much from it, *Generations* can be a worthwhile addition to the set, even if it isn't a 'must have'. **NAG**

Ramjet

/ **PLUS** / More activities / More stuff
/ **MINUS** / Not a game changer / Non-essential

IT'S A NICE ADDITION FOR FANS, BUT IS NOT ESSENTIAL.

70

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Surf - Email - Chat
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"With those heroes who once
braved the hordes now turned
to madness, Tristram is in
need of a new champion."

Diablo III

And the heavens shall tremble

For many people, *Diablo III* is their most anticipated game of all time. You'd be surprised at who turns out to be a secret *Diablo* fan – your hairdresser, younger sisters, embassy clerks and even that weird uncle who nobody sees except for occasional 50th birthday parties. With global sales to match the original *StarCraft*'s (outside of South Korea), *Diablo II* is one of those games that almost everyone knows about, and for good reason. *Diablo II* managed to bring together action and role-playing game mechanics at a point of balance so fine that few games since have been able to match. Many have tried, many have failed and a couple managed to get it right, but the simple truth is that almost every *Diablo II* player out there is just waiting for its sequel, even if it's developed by an almost entirely new team at Blizzard, which is the case. *Diablo III*'s release date is still a closely guarded secret (or they really don't know), but the beta is so new that we'd be surprised if it's not available by time you read this. NAG had a chance to fly out to Blizzard's HQ in Irvine, California to get some hands-on time with the game in its "almost beta" form, which features a decent chunk of the first act, although not everything is as it will be in the final release version.

For twenty years, the world of Sanctuary has been at peace since the Lord of Destruction was killed. New Tristram was founded by merchants who made their fortunes from travelling adventurers with bags full of loot, and the town has prospered. But the predictions by some scholars and wizards that the End of Days draws near (again) seems to hold some truth, as a fiery meteor falls from the sky and crashes into the legendary Tristram Cathedral. Now, the dead are rising from their graves once more and the wild animals have turned into creatures of demonic power. With those heroes who once braved the hordes now turned to madness, Tristram is in need of a new champion.

For our first playthrough, we decided to play as a male Witch Doctor who has travelled to the town of New Tristram to see how he can help deal with its recent undead problems. Upon reaching the town gates, we find the guard captain Rumford desperately trying to keep at bay a force of zombies. After we popped off a few poisonous darts and helped put the enemy back in the grave, Rumford was impressed enough to have the town gates opened, and told us to speak to a woman named Leah who, as it turns out, is the adopted niece of Deckard Cain. While walking through the town, we see bodies piled up in mass funeral pyres; scared townsfolk and guards alike tell us of the horrors they've encountered; our faithful stash awaits us outside the local inn. The recently deceased rise from their death beds and the local barkeep is just worried about what this will do for business. He's also kind enough to offer us coin for any unwanted loot we have, and will sell us a few healing potions and identify scrolls that he has lying around. The healing potions in *Diablo III* don't behave quite the same way as before; their use results in a long cooldown time, but they'll pull you out of a tight spot if the need arises. Instead of knocking back healing potions every time you stub your toe, you'll find healing orbs that will drop from slain enemies, forcing you to stay in combat and position yourself carefully if you want

"While walking through the town, we see bodies piled up in mass funeral pyres; scared townsfolk and guards alike tell us of the horrors they've encountered; our faithful stash awaits us outside the local inn."

CRAFT ME A RIVER

Diablo III will feature a crafting system, but the developers don't want it to feel like the greatest hero Sanctuary has ever seen has a part-time job banging anvils and grinding herbs. Instead, there will be three artisans who will follow you in a caravan from town to town. These artisans will need to be unlocked as you progress through the game, and the main quest will see you attempting to gain their trust before they dedicate their lives to you and give up any hope of settling down. Each artisan will have a skill level, and you'll be able to increase that level by finding Pages of Training, combining them into books, and handing over the book and a bit of gold. As well as learning new recipes as they gain levels, the artisans' repertoires can be expanded with recipes that you find in the world. Items are crafted from crafting materials that can be salvaged from any equipment items once you find the Cube of Nephilim.

BLACKSMITH: The first artisan that you encounter, the blacksmith can repair items as well as add gem sockets to them. Sockets can now be added to any magical item, regardless of quality, so legendary items can now be made even more legendary. He's able to craft a limited array of magical weapons, but his focus is armour-smithing.

MYSTIC: Primary function is the enchanting of existing items, but can also craft scrolls, potions, magical weapons, skill runes and charms.

JEWELLER: Can craft gems, rings and amulets. With the Horadric Cube absent from *Diablo III*, the jeweller is the only way that you can combine gems of lesser quality to form a single gem of higher quality. The jeweller is also the only person who can remove gems from socketed items.

to stay alive. Likewise, scrolls have had a bit of a change too – only rare and legendary items need to be identified, and town portal scrolls/tomes have been removed altogether. Now, players will be able to use the Stone of Recall (which they'll find during the first act as a part of the main story) to return to town whenever they wish, although a lengthy and interruptible casting time means that the ability can't be used to duck out of combat. This forms part of the design team's goal to make combat more menacing and less easy to exploit. No longer can you pop off a town portal whenever the situation becomes too dangerous; you'll have to make use of each character's escape and control skills to keep the enemy at bay long enough for you to figure out what to do next.

Leah is pleased that someone has come to the town's aid, but impresses on us that Captain Rumford has more urgent matters that need our attention. So, we went back to the man and he asks us to kill off a few of the creatures that raise the lower zombies, as well as the Wretched Queen that seems to be the immediate cause of the undead. We agree to help him, and journey off to the ruins of Old Tristram to find this Wretched Queen and score a ton of randomly generated loot. All of the environments are also randomly generated once again, and through each of our five playthroughs of the opening area, we were happy to find new encounters and environmental set-pieces each time. Those set-pieces are a big part of the worlds now, and serve to break up the combat by providing mini scripted events. These events could be simple, like treasure chests that cause skeletons to rise from the ground when opened, or pits from which the undead will climb when you walk past. More complex events include an injured guardsman or caravan driver who will utter their dying words to you, or even interactive environmental pieces like chandelier ropes or wall supports that can be cut to fall on enemies. The worlds of *Diablo III* are far more interactive and alive than those before it. Other set-pieces are by design, and will always be encountered. We saw the charred remains of Griswold the blacksmith's store, and were pleased to find our first rare item inside. Thinking "Grisworld would've wanted me to have it", we took the poisoned dagger and, once identified, we equipped it alongside the creepy Wanga doll that the Witch Doctor likes to rattle in people's faces.

> "All of the environments are also randomly generated once again, and through each of our five playthroughs of the opening area, we were happy to find new encounters and environmental set-pieces each time."

We soon find the Wretched Queen and put her out of her misery with a bit of running away and careful skill use. By this stage, our level four Witch Doctor had gained a few new skills which we were still getting used to, but a combination

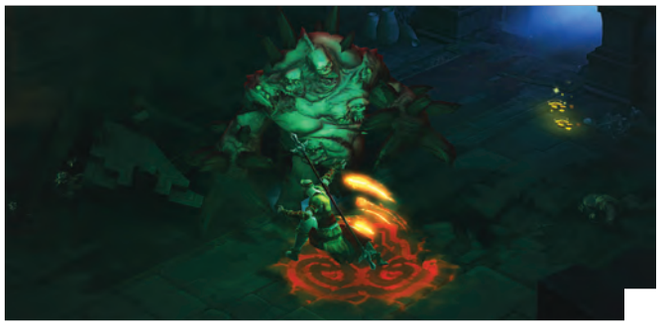
Tristram Cathedral is older than the town itself and has been the site of both Horadric and Zakarum worship over the years.

TIME IS MONEY

Those of you who played *Diablo II* online using Blizzard's then awfully primitive Battle.net service will be familiar with the economy that developed over time. As an item-driven game, online players in *Diablo II* were encouraged to trade items and gold with other players, and for people without hundreds of hours for online gaming, trading was the only way to complete item sets or find the gear that you needed for particular encounters. The problem with this economy was that it was built on a flimsy trading system that took years to be patched into something decent – players were frequently ripped off and cheated out of in-game gold and items, and many who delved into the murky waters of real-world currency trading found themselves on the receiving end of credit card fraud. In short, B.net was like the lawless Wild West, but with Blizzard's current service running both *StarCraft II* and *World of Warcraft*, things are set to change.

B.net will feature random matchmaking, cross-game friend tracking and chat, Real ID support, PVP arenas and all the other things you could expect, but here's something you may not have anticipated: an auction house. Similar to the auction house in *WoW*, *Diablo III*'s system will allow all players of the same region (that's Europe in our case) to buy and sell items by bidding in-game currency (gold). Then, there's the matter of real-world currency. You will be able to spend real money on items and gold for sale within the separate real-world currency auction house. Blizzard will take a small, fixed cut of that cash three times: once when you list an item, again when/if the item is sold, and finally, if you decide to cash out from the Battle.net electronic wallet that will store your money. Alternatively, and we get the impression that this is the preferred choice, you can re-invest your money without cashing out, by buying in-game items as well as anything else available on the B.net store, such as digitally distributed games and *WoW* game time. Thankfully, each account will be entitled to a number of free listings per week, which, to be frank, will be the only way that we'll start using this service.

Goatmen! They're back and still make that disturbing bleating noise when you hit them. Poor little guys.

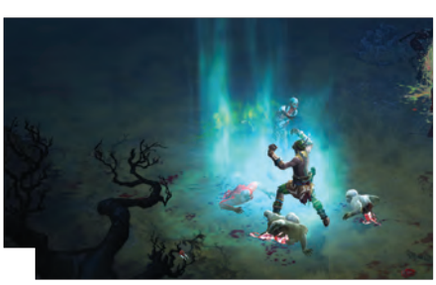


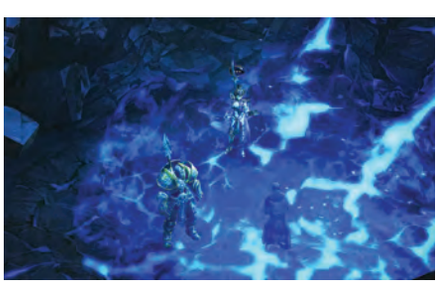
RAINBOW NATION

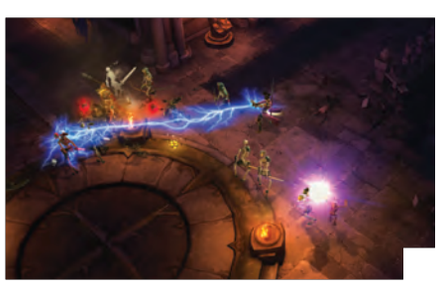
Let's take a few minutes to address the art style in *Diablo III*, as it's a big part of what put people off the game when they first saw it over a year ago. After having seen and played the game in what we imagine is its final visual iteration, we can safely say that it looks great. Not because it uses fancy shaders and mapping, but because it has a strong, coherent aesthetic, and that's more important to a game like this than any level of technological prowess. The game's art director since 2009, Christian Lichtner tells it like it is.

"At Blizzard, we're fortunate enough to make games that are played for a long time. Thus, it's important to have a game that looks good not just because of the technology behind it, but because of its strong art style."

It's that art style that has brought so much controversy to *Diablo III*, with many people feeling that the game is too bright and colourful, or that it looks too much like *World of Warcraft*. However, that's not the case. The game benefits from its use of colour *because* it doesn't abuse it. Colours are meaningful – they're used to lift the chaos of battle up from the backgrounds and deepen the fantasy. This is, after all, a fantasy game; those looking for realistically-sized pauldrons and grey-on-brown-on-grey colour palettes are welcome to play *Gears of War*. With that said, the saturated colour palette shown in screenshots released over a year ago has been toned down to something a little less *My Little Pony* and a little more *Diablo*, although it's probably still going to bother a few people.







BARBARIAN

The Barbarian's primary focus is damage-dealing, but he'll be able to wear plate armour and even use a shield if you're more interested in the classic "warrior" class. His energy type is Fury, which is generated by taking damage and dealing it, and will drop quickly once the Barbarian is out of combat. Fury generating skills tend to inflict less damage and have their own cooldown periods, whereas those that consume Fury are the hard-hitters and can be unleashed in quick succession if the Barbarian has enough of the resource.

WITCH DOCTOR

An outcast of the Umburu tribe, the Witch Doctor uses his powers to summon terrible creatures to do his bidding, either in the form of direct damage or enemy control. Some of these creatures are permanent, and will follow and protect the Witch Doctor, while others are born only to die moments later, which gives his spells a unique visual style. The Witch Doctor uses mana, a slow-regenerating energy, to summon creatures. As he gains levels, his maximum mana pool will increase, allowing him to summon more powerful creatures and lesser ones more frequently.

SHOW SOME CLASS

DEMON HUNTER

As all Demon Hunters, she is a survivor of a demonic attack and uses her hatred of all things evil to fuel her powers. The Demon Hunter favours the bow and crossbow, and many of her abilities are designed to keep her out of melee combat. When not firing off arrows or bolts (no ammunition required this time) and jumping around the battlefield, the Demon Hunter can place traps and wards in the world to control the enemy. She uses two energy types: Hatred and Discipline. The former is a fast regenerating resource similar to the Wizard's Arcane Power, and is used for offensive skills; the latter regenerates slowly, but has a larger pool and is used to power the Demon Hunter's defensive skills.

WIZARD

A real bookworm, the Wizard has spent her life studying the dark and arcane arts that few magic users would dare to touch. As such, her energy resource is Arcane Power, which is a fast regenerating energy with a limited pool. This encourages players to frequently cast spells of all power levels, which include regular damage-dealing spells like ice beams and meteors, as well as defensive spells that disrupt and control the fabric of time.

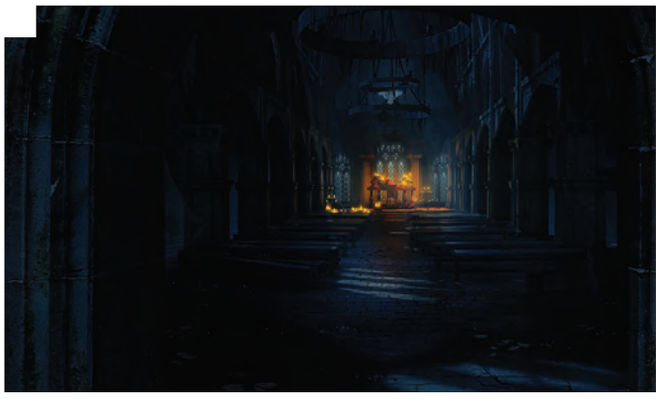
MONK

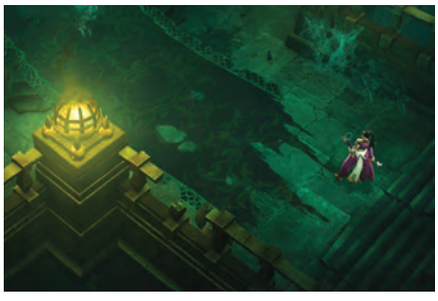
A stoic believer in the power of prayer, the Monk prefers to use his fists to deal righteous justice to the demon hordes that now plague Sanctuary, although he's not too proud to use a sword or axe if the need arises. As a warrior priest, the Monk thrives in the heart of combat, where he is able to generate Spirit whenever he dishes out damage. That Spirit is used to power his skills, which include damage-dealing, control and healing abilities, as well as aura-like buffs called Mantras.

of spammed low-end attacks and a few area-of-effect spells to deal with her minions (which included quill fiends, zombies and skeleton archers) resolved the situation quickly. The skill system in *Diablo III* is one of those areas that's had perhaps the biggest adjustment from previous games. Instead of earning skill points, characters will gain one or more new skills (active or passive) each level until about level 30. These skills will automatically increase in power as you gain character levels, and higher-tier skills are designed to replace the lower ones. The trick here is that you can only have at most six active skills available to you at any one time, as well as three passive skills. That means that, while it's easy enough to learn new skills, finding and using effective combinations for the task at hand will be the real challenge. You'll be able to swap out skills any time, but the game won't pause while you sit and read descriptions. You'll have to customise your skills loadout to suit enemy types, boss battles and, of course, your own personal preference. Additionally, you won't have access to all six active and three passive skill slots right off the bat, and will only unlock them at certain levels; passive skills only come into play at level ten and are a replacement for the traits from *Diablo II*.

With the Wretch Queen made a little less wretched, we return to Rumford and Leah to accept our XP, gold and item reward, and chat to Leah about her current predicament now that she's convinced that our Witch Doctor is the right man for the job. Unsurprisingly, our dear old friend Cain has got himself into a mess again – he's gone missing and Leah needs our help to find him. Before we can mount a rescue, Leah joins our party temporarily as we go to her dead mother's hut in the woods to find a few clues about Cain's exact whereabouts. We use the town waypoint to travel back to a location within Old Tristram (a mirror of the system found in prior *Diablo* games) and head to the hut, where we encounter a minor boss with his name in blue, in the form of the previous guard captain's resurrected corpse and his minions. We also find the first of three unique "management" items in the game – the Cauldron of Jordan. A play on the Stone of Jordan ring from *Diablo II* that all but replaced gold as a commonly traded item on Battle.Net, the Cauldron will allow you to instantly "sell" any inventory item for a little less than what a storekeeper would give you for it. This combines with the Stone of Recall and Nephilim Cube (detailed elsewhere on these pages) to reinforce *Diablo III*'s policy of keeping players away from town unless they absolutely have to be there. In the words of Rob Pardo, executive vice president of game design, "if you're going to return to town, we want it to

> "B.net will feature random matchmaking, cross-game friend tracking and chat, Real ID support, PVP arenas and all the other things you could expect, but here's something you may not have anticipated: an auction house."





MY RUNE

With skill points and skill synergies out the window, you might be wondering what will be left up to the player to customise. The answer to your unvoiced question is: Runestones. While Runes were useful in *Diablo II*, they were so close in function to gems and jewels that they were almost redundant. That is no longer the case, as Runestones have been given an overhaul and repurposed for the customisation of skills.

A single Runestone can be used to alter the effects of a single equipped active skill. Each Runestone has a particular type of effect that it delivers, such as an AOE property or life/energy restoration, but their results will be entirely dependent on the skill to which they are applied, and will sometimes drastically change the look and/or behaviour of that skill, which is a great way of turning "adds 20% damage" into something incredibly cool. Take the Demon Hunter's Cluster Arrow ability as an example. Ordinarily, the DH will fire a magical arrow that explodes at its destination and then releases a few small bombs that will also explode. Strap an Indigo Rune to it and those secondary bombs become enemy-seeking missiles, or use a Golden Runestone to change the bombs into life-leeching shadow creatures. The Barbarian's iconic Whirlwind attack is devastating as it is, but add to it a Crimson Rune and the Barbarian becomes a spinning whirl of flames, and an Alabaster Runestone will cause successful critical hits to confuse enemies into attacking their own kind. For the number crunchers out there, there are about 20-25 active skills per character class, multiplied by the five Runestones and single base skill, and you're looking at 120-150 ways to kill your enemies per character class.

YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE

NPC companions weren't much to look at when *Diablo II* first released, but subsequent patches and the expansion pack really helped them come into their own. In *Diablo III*, in addition to the occasional temporary NPC party member, you'll be able to choose a single permanent follower. These followers will have skills unattainable by the main character classes, and will offer words of wisdom or simply gossip from time to time. Followers can be customised with a weapon/shield combination as well as two rings and an amulet, and each type will have access to four active skills from a pool of twelve.

Enchantress: A ranged spellcaster, the Enchantress's skillset includes a few damage-dealing abilities, but her main focus is buffing you and your party members and debuffing enemies.

Scoundrel: A ranged character similar to the Rogue from *Diablo II*, the Scoundrel has plenty of damage-dealing abilities that use his crossbow, and also offers a few support skills.

Templar: This heavily armoured behemoth is happy to stand at the mouth of Hell and face an endless onslaught of demons. He uses a polearm and shield and, as well as tanking skills, has a few damage-dealing powers and even some healing.

One of the Witch Doctor's summoned creatures will regurgitate all over the enemy. Regurgitate what, exactly, we don't know.

be for more exciting reasons than emptying your inventory".

Now that we know where we're going, and the road to the Cathedral is open, we set off to rescue Deckard Cain. When we arrive at the location, we find that a giant hole has been blasted into the former site of Zakarum worship. That hole is also the only way into the basement levels of the building, so we jump down and prepare ourselves for what made *Diablo* so iconic – dungeon exploration. It instantly becomes obvious that *Diablo III* hasn't forgotten its roots. Familiar bats with electrified attacks and fleeting imps attack us while we break open barrels for gold and items. We go off in search of the stairs leading down but find a dead end instead. Backtracking through the library, we spot a lectern that we missed before. Clicking on it drops a book of lore to the ground; it's the first part of a diary written by a previous explorer to these parts. Activating a weapon rack causes that familiar "swish-clang" sound effect to play as the weapon falls to the floor. Even the layout of the dungeon, randomly-generated as it is, has the same feeling as *Diablo II*. We encounter a new monster, the Grotesque – a stitched-together, bloated zombie that explodes into a pile of deadly worm things when destroyed.

Finally, we descend to the lower level of the Cathedral and find Cain. He's also found someone – the Skeleton King Leoric has again risen from the grave and summons a pack of skeletons before buggering off down an inaccessible tunnel. We deal with the skeletons and Cain gives us his thanks. He then opens a nearby secret tunnel and we both return to the surface to head back to town.

That's it! We played quite a bit more, but don't want to spoil the story any more for you. Suffice to say, you'll do a lot more undead hunting and secret discovering. You'll gain levels and unlock new skills, and you'll find fantastic loot and random encounters. While it's obvious to us that *Diablo III* is doing everything it can to be a modern, innovative action-RPG, there's still plenty to it that you'll recognise as "definitely *Diablo*". It's still too early to tell if the mix of old and new will sit right with all gamers out there, and a few factors like the lack of LAN support and required permanent Internet connectivity will put a damper on some people's excitement. This may not be the *Diablo II* clone that some people were expecting, but it's a part bold and interesting, part classic and revering, take on the series that has us eager to play the final game when it's released. NAG

While it's obvious to us that *Diablo III* is doing everything it can to be a modern, innovative action-RPG, there's still plenty to it that you'll recognise as "definitely *Diablo*".

GeometriX

MCSA/MWEB/NAG/1450/E

ASUS Eee PC X101

ASUS has launched the Eee PC X101 netbook, ideally suited as a first computer for kids, teens and students. It only weighs 920g and is 17.6mm thin, so is extremely portable. It comes preloaded with the MeeGo operating system and can connect to Facebook and Twitter etc. Technical specs include an Intel Atom N435 CPU, 1GB of RAM, 2x USB 2.0 ports, a MicroSD Card reader, built-in webcam and 8GB SSD for quick startup and launch times. It can be ordered in two configurations - Windows 7 Starter with a 250GB HDD, or MeeGo OS with 8GB SSD.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Steam client that was first released on 12 September 2003 was intended merely as a patch delivery system and anti-cheating measure for Valve's online shooting games, such as *Counter-Strike*. *Half-Life 2*, which was released late 2004, was the first game that required online authentication via Steam to play, and this saw Steam becoming more widely adopted as a platform. Steam now has over 30 million users.

Vuzix Wrap 920 Video Eyewear

Watch 2D and 3D movies on a virtual 67-inch screen. The Wrap 920 connects to all NTSC or PAL audio/video devices with video-out capabilities and composite video connections.

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For use with all Android 2.x or later phones, Norton Mobile Security will protect and guard the personal info on your phone. Using a text message you can remotely disable your phone and erase your personal information. Other features include being able to lock your phone if the sim card is removed, block calls and texts from specific numbers, and keep all your data safe from viruses and other security threats.

R399 | www.symantec.com

/ tech Q&A /

Send your hardware questions to lauren@nag.co.za.

RAM Query
From: Jared de Beer
"I am looking to buy a new PC and I was wondering about which RAM to buy. In my price range and off the website I am ordering my components from (Sybaritic) my two choices are:
Corsair DDR3 - 1600 6GB (3 x 2GB) Dominator Memory Module Kit or
Corsair DDR3 - 1600 12GB (3 x 4GB) Vengeance Memory Module Kit
I want my PC to be the best I can afford and both are in the same price range. I would like to know which one is better."

Neo: Mathematics, especially where computers are concerned, dictate that more is better. 12GB vs. 6GB of the same speed, what do you think?

PC Monitor question
From: Michael de Jager
"I'm looking to buy a new monitor (>23 inch) and I'm looking to connect my Xbox with it through HDMI. I want to put it next to my computer monitor and I won't be able to afford most TV screens. The only problem is I won't be able to hear any audio without a monitor with 3.5mm ports.
Are there any small TV's or monitors with 3.5mm input ports you can recommend or are there any special cables or adapters I can buy?"

Neo: You can use the audio output of the Xbox in conjunction with the HDMI video output. Just get two barrel female to female converters, a 3.5mm stereo mini jack female to 2xrca make cable (you can get these at most electronic/ hi-fi stores) and you can plug in any set

Popcorn Hour Networked Media Jukebox

Connect this unit up to your home theatre, copy all your media files to it and watch HD movies or listen to music. If you connect it to the internet you'll also have access to the Apps Market and can download applications onto the hard drive.

R1,999 | www.popcornhour.co.za

AOC e2351fh

This ultra-slim LED monitor, measuring only 10.6mm is unique in the way that it can transform itself. The actual screen can be lifted away from the supporting stand, to reveal a shorter support that lets the bottom edge of the screen rest directly on your desk surface.

R2,399 | www.sahara.co.za

Digital Camo Skin

If you like to customise your tech gear then you need to head over to this website. We sent them two NAG custom designs and they made us vinyl skins for our PS3 and laptop. They were easy to apply and looked super cool.

R180 (PS3); R200 (16" laptop)
www.digitalcamo.co.za

of headphones or speakers that use a 3.5mm stereo mini jack.

HD 6990 vs. GTX 580
From: Pieter Coetzee
"Hi there, I was looking at your Dream Machine the last couple of months and I cannot understand why the GTX 580 is the best. So my question is, is the GTX 580 faster than the HD 6990? I have gone through many forums on the web and they state that the HD 6990 is way faster and the only way the GTX 580 can be faster is in SLI. So in a comparison between one GTX 580 and one HD 6990 which one is faster? I know in SLI the GTX 580 will win against the HD 6990 in Crossfire but we don't want the best paired (combination) of cards but the best single card.

The other question is why are AMD still using 256 bit on their GPU's when NVIDIA has gone up to 384 and maybe more? I have a MSI R6970 Lightning which is only 256, bit so if the card were 384 bit could it have been faster?
Thanks for an amazing magazine."

Neo: A 6990 is a dual GPU card, which costs more than two single 6970 cards which are faster. The 580, being even faster, allows SLI as well, so dual GPU, single PCB cards are a no, because they are multi-GPU configurations which don't offer the best performance in that configuration.

In answer to your second question, the bit-width is only relevant as far as achieving a desired throughput, be it 512-bit or 128-bit, you can achieve the same amount of bandwidth by having a sufficiently high clock speed. 256-bit bus @ 4000MHz gives the same performance as 384-bit bus @ ~ 2670MHz.

AOC e2352phz 3D monitor

Bringing 3D to your PC in 23 inch style, the AOC e2352phz 3D monitor is feature packed. It plays 3D movies and games, has an HDMI 1.4a input, built-in speakers, and a contrast ratio of 20,000,000:1. It can also be wall mounted and comes with a 3 year warranty.

Google Maps Navigation gets local

If you own an Android device and like to use it to help you make your way through the roads of South Africa, you'll be pleased to know that turn-by-turn, voice-guided navigation from Google Maps has finally arrived on our shores. The system was launched in conjunction with Sony Ericsson's launch of their new Xperia Arc and Neo devices – two high-end smartphones to top the Xperia range – but can already be downloaded for any device running Android 1.6 or higher (which is over 95% of Android devices out there). As with all Google products, Maps Navigation is entirely free.

Google Maps Navigation will also include 3D views of all major city centres in South Africa, as well as Street View and the standard satellite and road views, so you can figure out exactly what the area through which you're travelling will look like. Currently, the local version of Maps Navigation has limited support for voiced road names, as we imagine the digitised American female voice would struggle with the pronunciation of roads like Witkoppen Road and Khotha Mkhunya Road. According to Google South Africa, they're addressing the issue.

Razer Electra gaming and music headphones

Product features of the new Razer Electra headphones include enhanced bass response with optimized drivers, replaceable sound-isolating leatherette ear cushions, detachable rubber sheathed audio cable, detachable inline microphone audio cable for voice communication, and flexible headband structure and snug-fit ear cups.

Know Your Technology

/ X86 VIRTUAL MODE /

This technology allows the execution of real mode applications that would otherwise be incapable of running under the old protected mode operating systems. It uses a segmentation scheme identical to that of real mode that creates 20-bit linear address in the same manner as 20-bit physical address in real mode. This is not used in modern computing but those that need to run DOS programs under modern day operating systems may use this mode through virtual DOS machines as well.

/ PROTECTED MODE /

Also known as protected virtual address mode, this is a mode for x86 CPUs that allows the system software to use features such as virtual memory paging, and multi-tasking. Due to the many enhancements that protected mode allows, it became widely adopted and has become the foundation for all subsequent enhancement to the x86 architecture.

/ PAE /

Physical Address Extension is a feature that allows 32-bit processors to access physical address space that is greater than 4096MB. This was first available in the Pentium PRO, and later enhanced by AMD to support page hierarchy further extending the addressable bits to 52-bit physical address and adding NX bit as well. For x86 processors, PAE allow the physical address size to increase from 23 to 36-bits which increases the maximum physical size from 4GB to 64GB that a CPU (32-bit) can handle.

/ VT-D /

Better known as x86 Virtualization, this is what allows multiple operating systems to share x86 processor resources in a safe and efficient manner. VT-D in particular refers to hardware supported virtualization through logic in the CPU. This is significantly faster than software approaches and simplifies resource management for software developers.

Snippets

Kingston has shipped its first SATA Rev. 3.0 6 Gb/s solid-state drive, the **HyperX SSD**. It features the latest SandForce controller and is designed for enthusiasts, gamers and performance users.

Thermaltake has released another work of art in the form of the **Level 10 GT Snow Edition**. It's basically the same eSports chassis, with a few minor tweaks and additions, but it now comes in a crisp white colour, and it looks oh so sexy.

Photos have appeared on the 'Net of the soon-to-be-released **Cooler Master Cosmos II** PC case. It looks curvier than the original but is still sporting its trademark rail-suspended box shape. Look out for it in October sometime.

Thermaltake have added some new liquid cooling products to their Bigwater series. The Bigwater **A80 and Bigwater 760** plus for CPU's have been released along with the new Level 10 GT Liquid Cooling Chassis.

Activision and Turtle Beach have announced a partnership to release exclusively licensed, limited edition ***Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* Ear Force headsets.** They will be compatible with Xbox, PS3 and PC.

The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) recently published their newest wireless standard — Wireless Regional Area Network (WRAN). The new **IEEE 802.22** standard means that a single "hotspot" could cover over 31,000 square kilometres.

Mad Catz will release a new range of licensed ***Gears of War 3* audio products** for the Xbox 360 when the game launches.

GIGABYTE have announced that their entire range of 6-series motherboards are ready to support the next generation Intel 22nm CPUs (**LGA1155 Socket**) as well as offer native support for PCI Express Gen. 3 technology. These features can be enabled via a BIOS update.

Sony, Panasonic, Samsung, and XPAND 3D have joined forces to create the Full HD 3D Glasses Initiative, which will see product development for **standardised 3D glasses** begin in September, for release early in 2012.

Quote

"LG's position has always been that 3D will and must eventually function without glasses. The D2000 is a look at what the future has in store."

Si-hwan Park, Vice President, LG Monitor Division

LG unveiled a glasses-free monitor that uses eye-tracking technology. The 20-inch D2000 monitor's 3D effect comes courtesy of glasses-free parallax barrier 3D technology, and the application of the world's first eye-tracking feature to the monitor.

World of Warcraft on your mouse

The SteelSeries *World of Warcraft* MMO Gaming Mouse Legendary Edition will be available in the next month. Sleeker and more compact than the previous *WoW* mice, the Legendary Edition features 16.8 million illumination colour options, 11 programmable buttons and multiple macros which can all be assigned from directly within the game interface.

By the Numb3rs

666,666

That's the goal of Raymond Cox A.K.A. Stallion83, an Xbox gamer. He wants to get to 666,666 Gamerscore by 31 October 2011, which is Halloween. At the beginning of August this is what his profile looked like:

Total Gamerscore: 600,031
Total Achievements: 24,934
Total Games Played: 878
Total Completed Games: 510

So he basically has 3 months within which to get 66,666 gamerscore. He says on his blog that his ultimate goal is to reach 1,000,000 Gamerscore.

Razer Mouse Bungee

Razer has given the mouse bungee a makeover in the form of a sleek design with a black finish. It's also sporting a stable taut arm through which your mouse cord gets threaded. Other additions include anti-slip feet and a weight inside of the base.

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- 8-Ch HD Audio(Optical)
- Anti-static(ESD) design
- All solid capacitors design

A75F-M
- AMD A-series APU support
- USB3.0/SATA3.0
- 1xPCIe x16,4xDDR3
- HDMI/DVI/D-sub Output
- 8-Ch HD Audio(Optical)
- Anti-static(ESD) design
- All solid capacitors design

A75F-M2
- AMD A-series APU support
- USB3.0/SATA3.0
- 1xPCIe x16,2xDDR3
- HDMI/DVI(Optional)/D-sub Output
- Anti-static(ESD) design
- All solid capacitors design

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Top Shot Elite

[info]

RRP:
TBA
Website:
www.cabelas.com

[technical]

Platform(s):
360 / PS3 / Wii
Developer:
Activision
Publisher:
Activision
Distributor:
Megarom

[summary]

Pros:
// Looks and feels well made
// Everything is wireless

Cons:
// Some button placement
Sensor limitations

Alternatives:
The real thing!

Activision loves peripheral gaming. From clacking plastic guitars to wheel-less skateboards that scratch your pine floors, the publisher has proven that it's not afraid to support the desires of its developers to release games with bundled peripherals. This particular peripheral marks the return of one of gaming's oldest – the light gun – in a sturdy, good-looking package that'll make you feel like a total badass while you're gunning down a flock of birds with a shotgun.

SETUP AND CONTROLS

When you remove the Top Shot Elite from its packaging, it'll be in three pieces: the main body, the scope and the stock, which snap together in a most satisfying way. You don't *have* to use the scope or the stock, but the former is used for the animal/clue tracking sequences in *Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2011*, and the latter will go a long way to help stabilise the gun. Its motion-tracking is extremely sensitive, so you'll want as much stability as possible. The package also includes a wireless receiver unit which should be placed either on top of or at the base of your TV. While it didn't have much trouble tracking horizontally, we found that the maximum height that the sensor can track will be pushed to its limits if you have a 50" TV. Even then it requires some fiddling with the game's calibration.

The Top Shot Elite for Xbox 360 and PS3 functions in almost every way like a regular controller (with the Wii version dropping the controls in place of a Wii Remote and Nunchuck dock), and has most of the buttons you'll need to navigate the interface and perform in-game actions other than shooting a fleeing buffalo in the legs. There are two analogue sticks, a d-pad, all four face buttons, the Guide/PS button, as well as back and start buttons. The positioning of the left analogue stick and d-pad will mean that either one will be easy to reach, depending on your handedness, but the one that's out of the way will be *really* inaccessible.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

We often like to speculate about the future of the gaming industry, and can't help but think that the Top Shot Elite is Activision's attempt at finding the next big thing in the peripheral gaming market. Clearly, a lot of effort has clearly into the engineering of this controller so it wouldn't make sense to simply dump it onto the tiny hunting game market and be done with it. Unlike the skateboard controller, which is limited in use to skateboarding, snowboarding, or, umm... surfing games, the Top Shot Elite could be used effectively in any first-person shooter game with the right software backing it up. While we're unlikely to see the next *Call of Duty* allow you to take up plastic arms, we wouldn't be surprised to see something off the AAA radar make its attempt to do so.

CABELA'S DANGEROUS HUNTS 2011

If you've ever wanted to take to the wild, snow-covered mountains of

America and scorched sub-Saharan plains of "Africa", armed to the teeth with high-powered weapons and murderous intent, then this is the game for you! *Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2011* continues the spirit of the *Cabela*'s series by putting players in the role of a hunter who sets out to kill animals in their natural habitat. *Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2011* is pretty ridiculous in how it portrays wild animals as beasts of near-demonic intent and power, but right from your very first kill (an elk, after which you have to cut out and eat its heart (we're not kidding)), it becomes clear that it's not going for the survival simulation genre but rather action/survival horror. The game is fantasy, and while its roots lie in the cringe-worthily poetic portrayal of man versus beast, it'll only irritate you to a point of refusal to play if you wear flowers in your hair more often than you wash it.

The game includes a few extra modes of play if you're bored/finished with the story mode. There's a regular shooting gallery mode that will see you attempt to make it through a number of unlockable missions, racking up as many kills as possible, without the need to worry about ammo limits. Then there's survival mode, which is similar to shooting gallery but instead loops a short mission over and over again, ramping up the difficulty and animal speed each time. The game also has support for competitive or co-operative multiplayer, with up to four players battling it out at the same time. **NAG**

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Adding a new dimension to gaming with its XFX AMD Radeon HD 6870 and 6850 graphics cards, play in a new dimension. This latest series of AMD Radeon graphics cards is AMD's first introduction of a 3-D gaming and multi-media solution for desktop computers as well as the first, and only, HDMI 1.4a solution for Stereophonic 3-D on the market.
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dream machine / dream machine / dream machine

Dream Machine

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TOTAL: R52,805

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www.gigabyte.com

PSU
Antec High Current Pro 1200 Watt PSU
www.antec.com

Processor
Intel Core i7 980X
www.intel.com

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NOCTUA NH-D14 CPU Cooler
www.noctua.at

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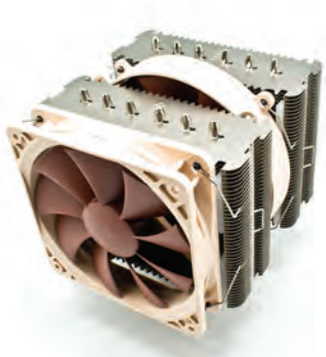

Mouse
Roccat Kone[+]
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MSI GTX580 Lightning
www.msi.com

Mousemat
Roccat Alumic
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The PC Patriot aka "the real world idiot" (part 2)

It's come to my attention over the last month, or at least since I wrote part 1 of my column, that the vast majority of those polarized by platforms (or anything, for that matter) are by and large the ones who invest the least in those platforms.

This could purely be economics or other factors, but thus far it's the most plausible argument I can make. Simply put, the person who is in a position to buy one or several $500 graphics cards is likely the person who has all relevant consoles or gaming devices. After all, just a single GTX 580 costs more than the most expensive console the world over. If you think that I'm suggesting that the seemingly well-heeled (or those that lack sound financial judgment) have more acceptable opinions than others, you'd be mistaken. I do however understand how this can convey that very sentiment, but do note that it's purely coincidental.

There's more to this debate I would think than what I can

> **"Yet another lamentable statement made by this horde of highly misguided idiots"**

cover but I have found that the average enthusiast wants to experience any title at its best regardless of what platform it's on. Whatever the investment needed, said individual will make it. It's these very people though that I seem to hear so little from. Not a good way to measure "enthusiasm", but browsing different forums, all those who found fault with *Crysis 2* and its visual upgrades are those using $150 graphics cards, those who simply don't have the PC capable of enabling the additional features, and sometimes people who just don't own a PC that's anything close to being ready for any game save for *FarmVille*.

Some go so far as to say that once again the optimizations are not up to scratch, and the DX11 effects are a patch job. Obviously these are ignorant statements as there's no way to conclusively prove them and even if there was, there's nothing sacred or holy about an API, but rather what is done with it. I sense a lot more resentment than disappointment, and as usual it's the PC patriots/or morons because these upgrades don't apply to anybody else.

It is these same individuals who repeatedly state that developers focus purely on the visual side of things at the cost of telling compelling stories or creating meaningful gaming experiences. Yet another lamentable statement made by this horde of highly misguided idiots. There's no direct correlation between any script and those who are in charge of the visuals. In fact those two could be mutually exclusive. A terribly written story remains so regardless of how it's brought to "life", much like a great story remains so despite it's appalling graphics (*Deus Ex* for example). In forum lingo, "the guy who writes the shaders is not the guy who wrote the story".

It seems that those that feel they are losing as "PC gamers" are the ones who are the hardest to satisfy on all fronts. They hold on so dearly to their precious PCs, which in reality are not that precious because that Pentium 4 Dual Core and 2GB of RAM with a 7800 GTX are worth less than an Xbox Arcade. The ones who have the Core i7s with 8GB of RAM and 6970/GTX 580 cards don't seem to moan as much, they just buy games and play them, regardless of what platform they are on. Interestingly enough it is these very same people who speak wonderfully about the DirectX 11 update that *Crysis 2* received.

Neo Sibeko

AMD LLANO APU

Our computing landscape is changing. In fact it already has and continues to do so faster than most of us can appreciate. If you've been around computers for at least ten years you'll recall some significant changes in computer architecture and what we expect from our PCs. Today, the average computer is not only far more powerful than the most powerful computer one could build in 2005, it also does significantly more.

The single most significant aspect of computing advances has to be in how it allows us to express our creativity. The more power we have at our disposal, the greater the virtual worlds we can imagine. In a way, our imaginations are limited by the power we have at our disposal, and inversely the power we have is limited only by what we can imagine. This relationship is what drives us to better platforms, better products, better means of communication (or at least more avenues with which to communicate). It is in the re-evaluation of this relationship that our greatest advances are made and it is this change that modern day platforms are being spurred on by.

At a micro level and where this article is concerned, the two IHV's here have realized or rather have accepted that the world we live in is far more visual than ever before. It's the richer visual experiences that drive technology, and it's the quest for hi-fidelity stimuli that drives most of our technological breakthroughs.

Nowhere is this more prevalent than in our entertainment. The days of overtly obvious CGI in our media getting a pass are gone. Our eyes are keener and now we rarely, if ever, complement CGI, but we will berate substandard renderings.

Offline renderings or pre-rendered media is moving at an incredible rate, not only because we have more powerful tools at our disposal, but the hardware we have is increasingly more powerful, increasing at an almost logarithmic fashion. This

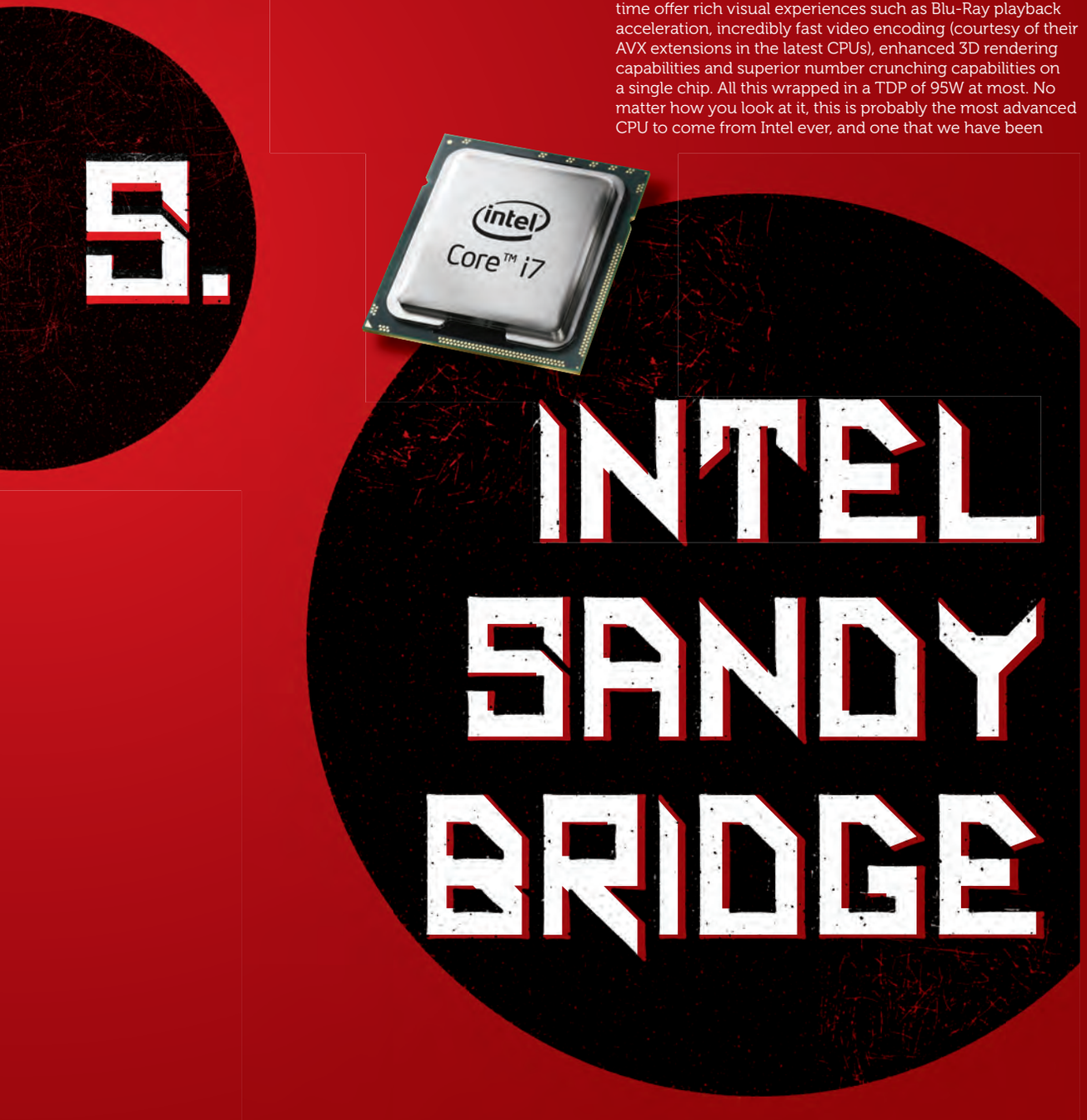
"AMD's strength is in the integrated graphics processor. In fact this is likely the first time AMD's overspend on ATI several years ago has actually resulted in some tangible benefits to the company."

"Intel, with the Sandy Bridge family, has the ability to not only ship sufficiently fast CPUs, but in those CPUs also package a graphics processor that is leaps and bounds ahead of what they had before."

power however is still far from being accessible to the average user, as the average user is one who uses a desktop or mobile device that uses an integrated graphics controller.

In fact by numbers alone, Intel is the largest graphics controller manufacturer in the world, significantly bigger than all the competitors put together. Great news for Intel, but tragic for the actual end users, as Intel GMA controllers are notoriously slow, lack features, driver support and are just about the worst one could do in modern computing. It was only with the introduction of Sandy Bridge and the relevant chipsets for it that things turned around. Besides making the integrated solutions faster and feature rich, Intel has arguably threatened low end graphics controllers from third party manufacturers such as AMD and NVIDIA.

Intel, with the Sandy Bridge family, has the ability to not only ship sufficiently fast CPUs, but in those CPUs also package a graphics processor that is leaps and bounds ahead of what they had before. This essentially cuts out the need for a third party, which makes system integrators happy, customers have a better computing experience and all this ultimately makes Intel even more dominant than it already is. With the most advanced bulk fabrication plants on the planet, Intel has the ability to leverage their expertise in this area producing low power, high efficiency graphics controllers that can share real estate with the traditional CPU die. Add an Integrated memory controller and PCH hub and Intel is essentially shipping a complete PC. One that can for the first time offer rich visual experiences such as Blu-Ray playback acceleration, incredibly fast video encoding (courtesy of their AVX extensions in the latest CPUs), enhanced 3D rendering capabilities and superior number crunching capabilities on a single chip. All this wrapped in a TDP of 95W at most. No matter how you look at it, this is probably the most advanced CPU to come from Intel ever, and one that we have been



impressed with since inception.

AMD on the other hand has had a rocky six years or so. In fact by our count Intel is roughly two and a half processor generations ahead. Not only in architecture but in processing node as well, which was not helped by AMD turning into an essentially fables semi conductor company. The AMD FM1 socket, or Llano as they would prefer, is AMD's first foray into the 32nm process. This is a good 12 to 14 months after Intel released their desktop 32nm part. Not only has Intel's 32nm High-K process improved dramatically, in real terms it's a couple of generations ahead of what AMD is manufacturing right now.

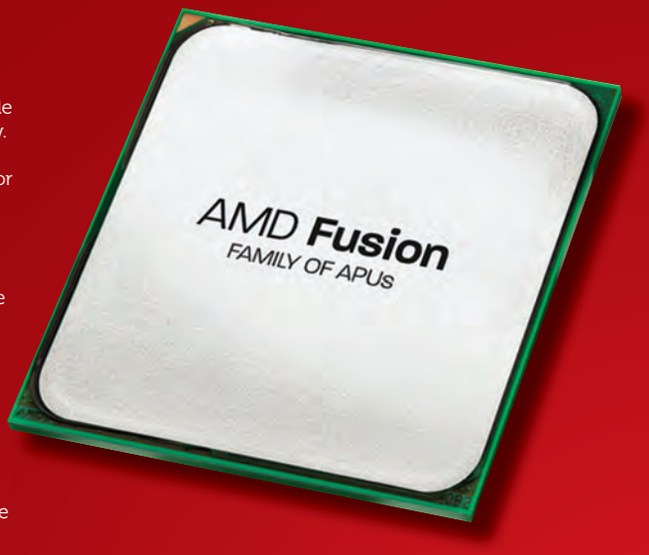
On paper, AMD's Llano platform doesn't offer anything better than what Intel has. In fact, other than the vastly superior graphics processor AMD has, there's simply no comparison between the two platforms at all.

However, AMD's strength is in the integrated graphics processor. In fact this is likely the first time AMD's overspend on ATI several years ago has actually resulted in some tangible benefits to the company. The minds at AMD have finally managed to leverage ATI's expertise at graphics processors in a way so as to directly benefit their CPUs, and in some ways create a better product than what Intel has.

In a show of graphics engineers, between AMD and Intel, AMD has Intel beat. With a long history of making graphics controllers and being the only other surviving company from the graphics chip wars, AMD's weapon is their graphics division. This is where the integrated RADEON HD6550D in the Llano APU's makes all the difference.

With 400 stream processors (more than what was on the RADEON HD 3870), the GPU inside AMD's APUs is light years ahead of what Intel can offer right now. In real world testing, we actually found that the AMD APU was, on average, twice as fast and sometimes faster. The stupendously superior CPU architecture in the Intel Sandy Bridge CPU could not overcome the sheer power of the GPU inside AMD's offering.

This is where it all got very interesting for us. AMD and



AMD A8 3850

Frequency: 2.9GHz
Cores: 4
Process: 32nm
Cache: 4MB
Socket: FM1 (905-pin)
Max Memory Speed: DDR3-1866
Die Size and density: 228mm squared
1.45BN gates
TDP: 100W
IGP: AMD HD6550D (600MHz)

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INTEL CORE i7 2600K

Frequency: 3.4GHz
Cores: 4 (8 threads)
Process: 32nm
Cache: 8MB
Socket: LGA 1155 (1155 pin)
Max Memory Speed: DDR3-1333
Die Size and density: 216mm squared 995M gates
TDP: 95W
IGP: Intel HD Graphics 3000 (850MHz)

NVIDIA have long contested that workloads these days are far more graphical than anything else. In fact NVIDIA has at least more than twice addressed the issue of balance between a capable GPU and a fast CPU. With the amount of power the average CPU has these days, most of it remains unused 90% of the time, and in fact the vast majority of users gain more from a better GPU than a faster CPU. It's no secret that there's virtually no difference in tangible or usable computing terms between a PHENOM II X6 1100T and a PHENOM II X4, yet the former costs much more. This holds true for Intel CPUs as well, where an Intel Core i7 2600K isn't meaningfully faster than an Intel Core i5 2500.

AMD with the Llano APUs hope to address this in a cost effective way and leverage their expertise in the graphics field against Intel's superiority everywhere else.

In our testing AMD's highest end APU, the A8-3850, was literally twice as fast as what Intel could offer with the Core i7 2600K in every test. It was only in the CPU centric Cinebench 11.5 where the roles were reversed and the Intel platform delivered results twice as fast. AMD has long championed their value for money point of view, marketing power per watt, power per mm and performance per dollar matrices without really convincing anyone. However for the first time, AMD genuinely has a point and the numbers are actually telling the same story. There just is no other way to look at it. Yes Intel has vastly improved their graphics controller and the fact that we were even able to run these benchmarks is testimony to that. However, AMD's solution is just superior where it counts. In the hugely visual world we live in today, the AMD Llano APUs are better suited to how we use our computers than Intel's Sandy Bridge products.

Intel will return with an even better solution with Ivy Bridge for sure, but right now, we have to give the nod to AMD's Llano platform. As it really is the most impressive integrated platform out there, if only for its significantly better price and enormously superior graphical performance. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

900Mbps Rock Star

Wireless Networking

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Versus

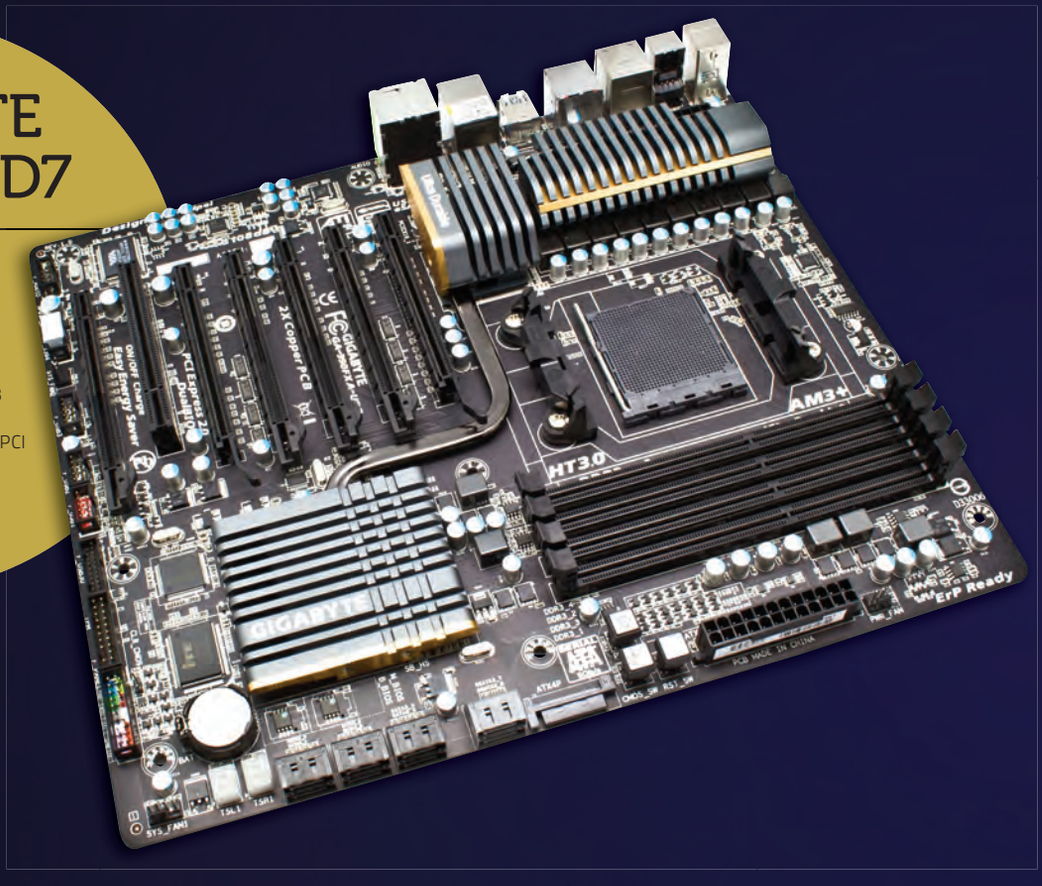
ASUS Crosshair V Formula vs. GIGABYTE 990FXA-UD7

GIGABYTE 990FXA-UD7

Price: R3,499
Supplier: Rectron

SPECS
Chipset: 990FX+SB950
Memory: 4x240-pin DDR3
CPU support: AM3/AM3+
Slots: 6xPCI-Express 16X, 1x PCI

9/10



If AMD wanted to make up for their delay of the FX CPUs, releasing the series 9 may have just bought the company some time. At least for the manufacturers, as they suddenly have reason to release new motherboards which are virtually identical to the 890FX boards they had before. So what you have here is more of an AMD platform comparison, more than an outright review of two motherboards based on a new chipset. More than that however, between these two components there possibly exists the best AMD motherboard on the market today. Unfortunately we couldn't get MSI to come to the party on time with the 990FXA-GD80, but we're adamant that between these two there's a board to suit you.

For almost a decade now, AMD CPUs have rendered their chipsets rather dull and unexciting. When AMD decided to integrate the memory controller onto the CPU package (more accurately the CPU die), the chipsets remained the same, only adding support for PCI-Express versions and the South Bridge receiving various tweaks and controller hub upgrades. Other than these changes though, there's not much difference between today's 990FX board and the NFORCE 4 chipset from 2004. If you want the best performance out of the AMD platform, you'll have to go with the more recent 890 or in this case the 990FX boards, which is why we gathered these two and pitted them against each other.

The GIGABYTE board was first and unlike everybody else, GIGABYTE has still not moved to the UEFI BIOS, instead they remain with the dated Award BIOS screen with no mouse support, or any advanced graphical interface. Some people prefer this over UEFI interfaces, but we'd like to see GIGABYTE produce one of their own sooner rather than later.

Other than this, the GIGABYTE 990FXA-UD7 is very similar to their other Intel based UD7 boards of late. It's finished in the black and gold colour scheme and has more PCI-Express slots than you'd know what to do with. Six in total, with two configured for 16 lanes each, two as 8 lanes and another two as 4 lane busses. To round it all up you'll get a single PCI slot which is placed just before the last PCI-Express slot. Much like the Crosshair V Formula, this board supports CrossfireX and 4-way SLI via the NF200 chip. Features-wise, it covers pretty much everything one can actually use on a motherboard. Absent is dual gigabit Ethernet and the kind of USB3.0 connectivity found on the P67A-UD7, but other than that it's a pretty well featured motherboard.

Where performance is concerned it doesn't disappoint. Overclocking this board is extremely simple and quick. It will take less than 30 seconds to get up to 4GHz with a 3GHz NB speed, and that will always be appreciated. Particularly useful if you're using extreme cooling where you don't need to fiddle with NB and memory frequencies.

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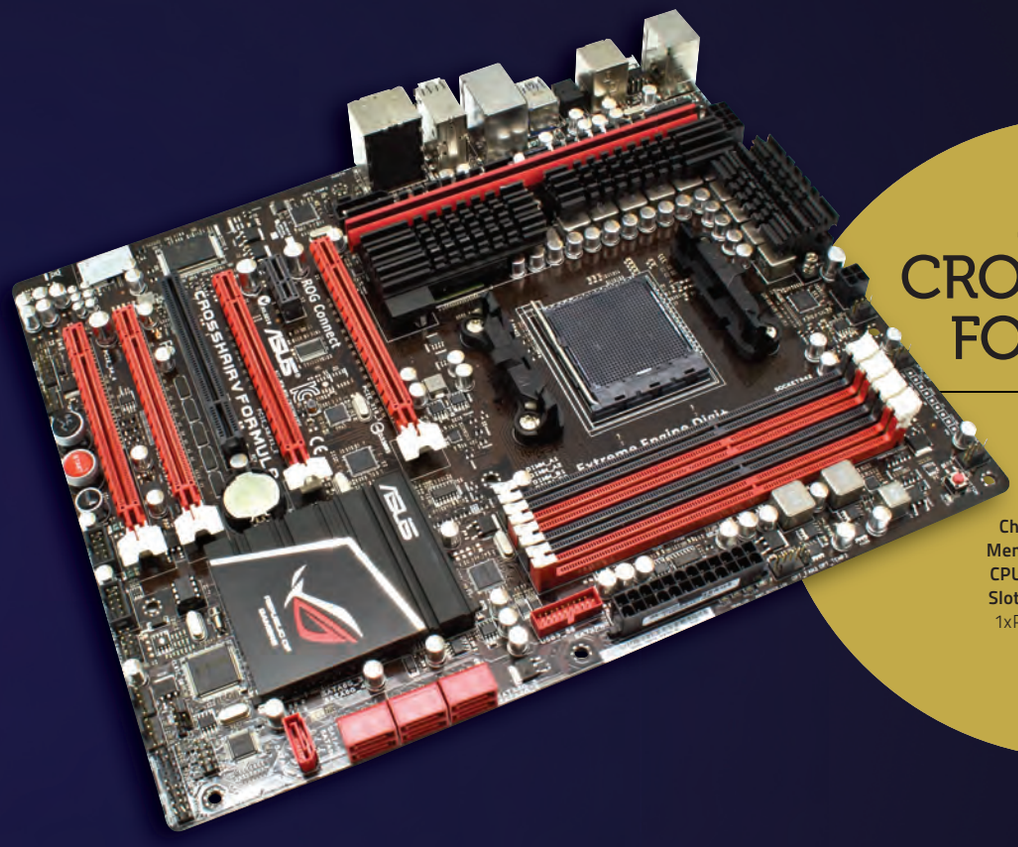
Benchmarks

	Cinebench 11.5	AIDA 64 read	AIDA 64 write	AIDA 64 copy	AIDA 64 latency	MaxxMem	3DMark Vantage
GA-990FXA-UD7 (F4b)	/ 7.15 /	/ 10,924 /	/ 10,061 /	/ 14,420 /	/ 40.3 /	/ 722.9 /	/ 22,674 /
Crosshair V Formula (0506)	/ 7.15 /	/ 10,744 /	/ 9,960 /	/ 9,760 /	/ 41.7 /	/ 621 /	/ 22,361 /



ASUS CROSSHAIR V FORMULA

Price: R2,399
Supplier: ASUS

SPECS

Chipset: 990FX+SB950
Memory: 4x240-pin DDR3
CPU support: AM3/AM3+
Slots: 4xPCI-Express 16X, 1xPCI-Express 1X, 1xPCI

7/10

What we would have appreciated is voltage measuring points like on the Crosshair V Formula. We've no idea why GIGABYTE would include these given that their UD7 board proved very popular with overclockers the world over. This is especially useful because for some reason the UD7 does not allow direct voltage input but uses an offset system which is annoying to say the least, especially on AMD Phenom II CPUs where the reference voltage may be reported as high as 1.45V.

The ASUS Crosshair V Formula on the other hand held such promise that its failure to live up to its forerunners was particularly disappointing. Issues with this board could have been isolated to our particular sample but the memory compatibility issues and the non-functional dual channel mode ruined what could have been a great board. Getting this board to POST proved very difficult and only three sets of memory later were we able get a POST screen. As you can see from the results, this board was slower in every test because of this. We attempted several BIOS versions and the situation didn't change. If we were in the market for a new motherboard we would be very wary of the ASUS Crosshair V because of this.

What added to the frustration of using this board was the lack of OC-Station support. Maybe forgivable on its own, as it's clear ASUS has no intention of ever supporting this peripheral again (the Rampage III Black Edition also lacks support for the OC-Station), however there's also no POST LED. So you'll have to guess what the issue is should you not be able to boot your PC.

Ignoring all issues with the ASUS board, we'd have to say it's the better looking of the two boards. GIGABYTE's black and gold is great and it grows on you, but nothing beats the red and black on the ASUS ROG products and this holds true for the Crosshair V Formula as well. AMD's FX series CPUs have stood up to the chipset so what we have is a handicapped review as we will probably have to re-do all these tests and more when AMD's next generation CPUs arrive later on in the year, but as it stands the GIGABYTE board is the superior product.

Having said that though, you'd be hard pressed to find a better board than what these two offer, or at least what the ASUS board could potentially offer. If we had to fork out money for a 990FX based motherboard right now, it would have to be for the GIGABYTE 990FXA-UD7. It's easy to overclock, has all the features you'd need, and save for the skimping on USB ports, it's a near perfect 990FX board and without question the winner of this showdown. When AMD's FX CPUs arrive and we have sourced another Crosshair V sample, we'll take a look at these boards again with the CPU north of 6GHz. Until then, the UD7 is our board of choice. NAG

Neo Sibeko

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MSI Z68A-GD80

Supplier: **Corex** / Website: **www.msi.com** / RRP: **R2,799**

Intel's Sandy Bridge platform, as we've always said, is probably the most unexciting platform to date. Manufacturers are producing virtually identical motherboards and we've seen just about every variation to all P67 and Z68 boards there can be. In fact, we strongly believe that if you are in the market for an LGA 1155 system, any motherboard will do.

You could close your eyes, pick randomly and you'd end up with a great motherboard. Annoying for manufacturers, but great for Intel and possibly consumers as it's impossible to pick a bad motherboard.

When the opportunity came to look at MSI's Z68A-GD80, we were less than excited to say the least. After all, we'd already seen the best MSI could offer for the platform and this motherboard would be identical save for the ability to use the Intel Graphics Accelerator built into the CPUs.

The Z68A-GD80 has almost all the buttons that you would find on their Big Bang products. Reset, power, OC Genie and voltage measurement capabilities are built onto the board. You won't find an audio riser card on this model, but the onboard audio controller is THX certified. In practical terms there's no incentive to buy the Big Bang Marshal over the Z68A-GD80. This is especially true in the benchmarks, because this board was faster and overclocked our 2600K just as well. In fact, we were able to get a slightly better Bclk from this board than we could from the Marshal.

This board may not have the same degree of USB3.0 connectivity, but it's well equipped and is very easy to work with. You'd be hard pressed to find a better board than this one on the market from any other manufacturer. Given that this was amongst the fastest boards delivering performance equal to that of the P8P67PRO, we're impressed and would recommend this motherboard to anyone looking to build a mid- to high-end machine. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Benchmarks

Super Pi 8M	/ 1min 57.1876 /	/ 2min 5.175 /
CineBench 11.5	/ 7.13 /	/ 9.34 /
3DMark Vantage CPU	/ 24,471 /	/ 33,737 /

Baseline: ASUS RAMPAGE III GENE

[specs]

Chipset:
Intel Z68CB3
Memory:
4x240-pin DDR3
CPU support:
Intel Core i3/i5/i7/ LGA 1155
Slots:
3xPCI-Express 16X, 2xPCI-Express 1X, 2xPCI

/ PLUS / Cheaper and faster than the Big Bang Marshal
/ MINUS / No 4-way SLI

A GOOD Z68 MOTHERBOARD, PACKED WITH FEATURES, THAT OVERCLOCKS AS WELL AS THE BIG BANG MARSHAL, WITH BETTER VALUE

9 OUT OF 10

HTC Flyer

Supplier: **Lab 88** / Website: **www.lab88.co.za** / RRP: **R6,880**

With the average smartphone sporting a 4" or larger screen, one has to wonder why anyone would need a 7" tablet. Well, as it turns out, having the extra screen size not only makes viewing Web pages, reading documents and handling emails much more comfortable than what a phone can offer, but keeping the size down means devices like the HTC Flyer can fit into the same space you'd usually reserve for a note pad. In broad terms, the Flyer will be perfect for anyone looking to replace their netbook or even a smartphone (this particular model has 3G, so you're connected to the 'Net almost anywhere), but what it has in portability, it lacks in functionality.

Running the Android 2.3 operating system, the HTC Flyer is already out of date by the time you open its packaging – many manufacturers prefer to go with the tablet-optimised Android 3.0 operating system. This could, of course, be remedied with a software update in future. Courtesy of the equally outdated onboard GPU, visual performance is poor, with the smartphone-designed Adreno 205 incapable of delivering smooth scrolling and video playback at the screen's resolution of 1024x600. It's not "deal-breaking laggy", but its noticeable, especially when compared to similar devices. With a smaller-than-average size you can also expect a smaller-than-average battery, only weighing in at 4000mAh, although it's still able to supply many hours of battery life more than a typical smartphone.

Setting aside the problems mentioned above, the Flyer is a great little device. HTC's Sense UI makes getting around the OS a simple and logical exercise, and the inclusion of a stylus adds the pen/drawing function that is almost unheard of in this market. It's not the most powerful device on the market, but should definitely find its niche among those looking for a small tablet loaded with social networking features. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

[specs]

Display:
Capacitive multi-touch LCD, 600x1024 resolution
Operating system:
Android 2.3
Connectivity:
3G HSDPA (optional), Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, HDMI
Battery:
4000mAh
Camera:
5MP rear, 1.3MP front
Chipset:
Qualcomm MSM8255 CPU (1.5GHz) and Adreno 205 GPU
Storage:
32GB onboard, microSD support

/ PLUS / HTC Sense UI / Tons of onboard storage / Stylus
/ MINUS / Outdated OS / Weak GPU

A GOOD MINI TABLET THAT WON'T DISAPPOINT IF YOU CAN OVERLOOK ITS FEW PROBLEMS.

7 OUT OF 10

ASUS MATRIX GTX580 PLATINUM

Supplier: **ASUS** / Website: **za.asus.com** / RRP: **R5,999**

The ASUS GeForce GTX580 DirectCU II was our previous Dream Machine graphics card and you'd be forgiven for thinking this would obviously replace that model. After all this is the MATRIX edition and if history tells us anything, ASUS MATRIX models are always better than their "regular" models.

With this card, it was clear that the engineers at ASUS had this in mind when they designed this card. With an 18-phase PWM and probably the most advanced power delivery system of any graphics card on the market ever, you'd be forgiven for expecting this to be head and shoulders above anything else from any manufacturer to date.

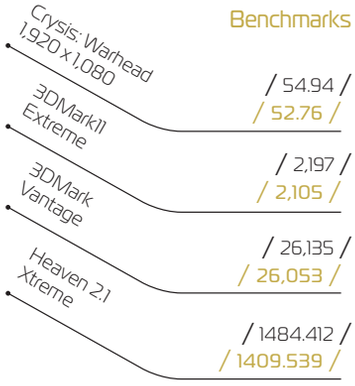
In some ways this is true, but it seems it's just not enough to warrant a purchase over the Direct CU II. This is simply because despite the overclock on this graphics card and the massive 2.5 slot cooler (it actually occupies three slots) and all the technical wizardry, this graphics card doesn't have the highest factory overclock out of the top three. That honour belongs to the GIGABYTE GTX 580 SOC, followed by the MSI GTX 580 Lightning (which coincidentally could just be the best out of the lot). So the clocks on this card place it squarely behind the others, yet it costs the most.

As it stands, the DirectCU II remains the most overclockable graphics card of this generation, so one would have expected this to be even better. Sadly you will never know because unlike with the Direct CU II, the bios and other software needed to make this card come into its own will never be made public. A certain Andre Yang, who is a prolific overclocker and ASUS employee, made this very clear to many enthusiasts and as such you'll be hard pressed to find a single MATRIX card that overclocks better than the Direct CU II which has publicly available software.

From an engineering point of view this is a fantastic card, maybe the best even. However from a practical point of view, you're still better off buying the ASUS GTX 580 Direct CU II. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Benchmarks



Baseline: NVIDIA GeForce GTX580

[specs]

Core:
816MHz GF110 (40nm)
Processors:
512
Render outputs:
64
Memory:
1586MB GDDR5 4GHz (192.3GB/sec)
API:
DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.X/ PhysX/CUDA

/ **PLUS** / Well engineered
/ **MINUS** / Pointless

THE BEST ENGINEERED GTX 580 GRAPHICS CARD ON THE MARKET, SADLY NOT THE BEST GTX580 MONEY CAN BUY.

7 OUT OF 10

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ASUS G74SX

Supplier: **ASUS** / Website: **za.asus.com** / RRP: **R22,999**

ASUS gaming notebooks have always been a favourite of ours. In fact our first Dream Machine gaming notebook was an ASUS G51J almost two years ago. Compared to that model the G74SX is better in almost every way. The specifications alone make this a worthwhile replacement for that model. More than the specifications though, this notebook is better built and, despite being heavier, it actually feels less cumbersome.

The best part about this notebook isn't the specifications list, but the comfort that it offers when using the keyboard. As far as track pads go it's average, as track pads are never ideal for gaming and a regular mouse is what you want to be using. The keyboard offers proper tactile feedback along with great spacing between the buttons, which means you'll likely be as quick at typing on this keyboard as you would be on a desktop unit. Some real thought has gone into the design, and this will be greatly appreciated especially for those who intend to use this as a desktop replacement.

The audio controller and drivers on this system are equally impressive. They may not be a match for the B&O audio solution that ASUS has on their other notebooks, but it sounds good enough to put it head and shoulders above any other gaming notebook audio we've tested to date. This is particularly useful because of the built-in double speed Blu-Ray drive which one is likely to use for movies more than anything else. Should you choose to go with headphones, the sound is equally impressive and you can use some of the TruSurround technologies offered by the ALC269 Audio controller.

Typical of the ASUS 3D Notebooks, the display is nothing short of incredible, offering crystal sharp detail and near perfect colour reproduction (at least as far as affordable notebook displays go). Pair this with 120Hz capability, and the G74SX offers some of the best movie watching experiences possible on any mobile device you can buy. The display is driven by a fairly competent GTX560M GPU which is a massive upgrade from what the G51J had. However it is still true that the GTX560M isn't really powerful enough to allow gaming in 3D when using the native resolution of the display. Stereoscopic 3D reduces performance by a sizeable margin and given that this graphics controller doesn't offer even 70fps in our *Resident Evil 5* benchmark at the native resolution, we'd recommend you drop the resolution to 1280x720 for most games. At this resolution you will be able to play most games in stereo 3D. Not an ideal situation, but a fair compromise considering that the original G51J notebook wasn't even capable of offering playable frame rates at any useful resolution.

If you decide to use traditional 3D the G74SX will not disappoint. We can't think of any game that won't run at a fairly high frame rate with medium to high graphics settings enabled. *Crysis 2* will work well on this notebook as well, provided you don't use the Ultra Quality settings and stick to the DirectX 9 rendering path.

It's very hard to fault this notebook on anything, and while we'd have preferred to see the recently released GTX580M (which is actually a desktop GTX560 at lower clock speeds) in this notebook, the 560M still provides decent performance. With 16GB of DDR3 1333MHZ RAM and two hard drives, this machine is very powerful, allowing one to run even the most taxing programs on it without issue.

Video editing, DTP, and other productivity applications will fly on this notebook even though the benchmark results don't show this. Every program starts instantly and this is what most people will appreciate more than the outright gaming performance.

The G74SX falls short of becoming our Dream Machine notebook of choice for academic reasons, but for all intents and purposes it's the best notebook we've tested to date. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

[specs]

CPU:
Intel Core i7-263QM (2GHz)
RAM:
16GB DDR3 1333
Graphics:
NVIDIA GTX560M
Display:
17" LCD (1920x1080)

Benchmarks

Unigine Heaven Benchmark 2.1 DX10 / 730 /

3Dmark Vantage / P9249 /

Resident Evil 5 DX10 / 62.6 /

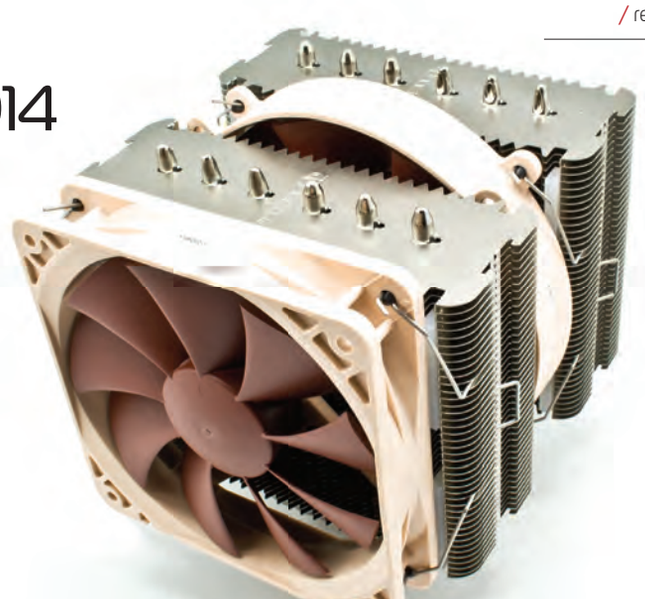
/ PLUS / Performance / 3D Vision / 16GB RAM
/ MINUS / Size / 192 core GPU

ONE OF THE FASTEST GAMING NOTEBOOKS WE'VE TESTED.

9 OUT OF 10

NOCTUA NH-D14 CPU Cooler

Supplier: **Evetech** / Website: **www.noctua.at** / RRP: **R699**



Noctua is a name that should be familiar to all hardware enthusiasts. However if it is not, you'd best familiarize yourself with the company and its products. Based in Austria, Noctua manufactures CPU coolers and could arguably lay claim to being the best at this, especially with the way the NH-D14 performs.

Granted this isn't a new CPU cooler and it's actually from 2009. Old as it may be, there's simply nothing else out there that we've come across that performs better. Not only is it compatible with all sockets right now including AMD's FM1, but it also cools every CPU out there jbetter than just about anything else that can claim to be competition.

The design isn't unique by any stretch of the imagination as it's still based on several heatpipes feeding heat to an array of fins. Instead of designing yet another cooler based on this simple principal of heat transfer, Noctua has effectively doubled everything on this cooler to make its thermal properties even better. Now it's not to say that what Noctua has simply added is more of what we are already familiar with. No, that would be incorrect because the fin density on this cooler isn't as high as you'd expect. Given that there are two fin arrays, the cooler is fairly light even with both fans mounted.

One thing is for sure though and that is this cooler is massive, so make sure it will fit in your case and is compatible with your motherboard before buying it. It's certainly the largest cooler we have ever tested here, but at the same time amongst the simplest to install and certainly the best performing by some margin.

Even more impressive is that this cooler is very quiet; with the fans spinning at maximum rotation it's almost inaudible, and that alone makes this an outstanding product. We've nothing negative to level at this cooler, but have a slight concern about its size. However, given that part of this incredible performance is reliant on its size, we can't really count this as a strike. The NH-D14 is simply the best cooler we've ever had. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

dream machine / dream machine / dream machine

[specs]

Size:
140x130x160 (mm)
Weight:
1070g
Compatibility:
1366/775/1156/1155/AM2/AM3/AM3+/FM1

/ **PLUS** / Very quiet / Cools very well / Simple to install / Very light
/ **MINUS** / It's huge / Brown fans are hideous

THE QUIETEST AND MOST EFFECTIVE COOLER WE'VE TESTED TO DATE.

9 OUT OF 10

TOP RATED GAMES

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GIGABYTE GeForce GTX570 Super Overclock

Supplier: **Rectron** / Website: **www.gigabyte.com** / RRP: **R4,999**

Usually when NVIDIA releases a new GPU family, or at least their two most high-end graphics cards, they are very close to each other in performance. After all they are based on the same GPU, but the lesser of the two has one eighth of the core fused off. This allows better yields per wafer, as GPUs that aren't fully functional can be reused in graphics cards such as the GTX 570. The GTX 570 this time, however, was a little less inspiring especially in light of cheaper and faster cards like the RADEON HD6970.

Since most GTX570 GPUs begin life as GTX580 rejects if you will, the parts that they are eventually paired with are usually second rate when compared to the GTX 580. Not to say that there's anything inherently inferior in GTX 570 cards, but the build and component quality is traditionally less than that of the GTX 480 for instance and better resembles that of the GTX470.

In this particular case, GIGABYTE has done something counter-intuitive, and instead of saving on the GTX 570 as far as BOP is concerned, they've actually built a custom PCB and outfitted the card with nothing but the best components, including the famed NEC Proadlizer de-coupling chips that are on all their SOC cards. Not content with the reference design, GIGABYTE has also built a PWM featuring 12 phases, which is more than what some GTX580 cards have. Not only that, but through GIGABYTE's own binning process (GPU Gauntlet they call it) they've managed to clock the card at a healthy 845MHz on the core while using the reference 0.988V.

The memory has not been touched from the reference 950MHZ (3,900MHz QDR) of the NVIDIA specification though, which is puzzling because we were able to clock this memory all the way to 1,200MHz (4,800MHZ QDR). If like us you fancy GTX580 beating speed, this card will happily do 900MHz on the core and at least 4,700MHZ on the memory, which when combined, result in a card that can match the GTX 580 MATRIX Platinum. If you can find this card for a fair price you should definitely consider it.

NAG
Neo Sibeko

Benchmarks

Lost Planet 2 1,080p DX11	/ 55.5 / / 55.2 /
Crysis 2: 1,080p DX11	/ 43.34 / / 44.763 /
3DMark11 Extreme	/ 2,101 / / 2,105 /

Baseline: NVIDIA GeForce GTX580

[specs]

Core:
845MHz GF110 (40nm)
Processors:
480
Render outputs:
40
Memory:
1280MB GDDR5 3.9GHz (152GB/sec)
API:
DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.X/ PhysX/CUDA

/ PLUS / Comfortably faster than a standard GTX 570 / Runs cool
/ MINUS / Could potentially cost more than a GTX 580

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8 OUT OF 10

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A different perspective

One of the best things about being a woman is that we can pretty much change our minds about anything, everything, and all the bits in between on instant notice, and blame hormonal turbulence and/or the availability and current dosage of chocolate and/or just because, why not. It's kind of like reinventing yourself just about every 30 minutes or so, which is probably why we[1] like trashy '80s and '90s pop music so much – our lives are pretty much indistinguishable from one of those brat pack movie montages.

If the average female had patch version numbers, we'd probably max out the entire array of integers by the time we're just a few weeks old, and have to substitute an increasingly abstracted, inscrutable, and extravagantly complicated sequence of ideograms instead. Which also conveniently doubles up as a rather nice metaphor to explain to the average male why, sometimes, he'll come home to his girlfriend just standing there in the garden, arched and howling at the full moon, with cake frosting and coal dust and glitter all down the front of her wetsuit. Really, it's just a phase.

So anyway, after playing guitar for almost 20 years[2], I recently decided I was over it and I'm going to learn to play the banjo. Due to sociocultural discrimination against the-other-right handedness, however, I've had some difficulties acquiring an appropriately oriented instrument, and in the meantime, been forced to retune one of my electric guitars like a banjo[3].

Significantly, this has presented me with an opportunity to play something ostensibly familiar, but in a totally different way. Which also conveniently doubles up as a rather nice metaphor for in-game achievements. (See, I do actually have a point.)

Recently, there's been an ongoing discussion on the *NAG* forums about the value of achievements and trophies and whatever else game developers are calling them these days, with some people saying they pay no attention to them whatsoever. Well, obviously those people are missing out.

"I recently decided I was over it and I'm going to learn to play the banjo. Due to sociocultural discrimination against the-other-right handedness, however, I've had some difficulties acquiring an appropriately oriented instrument..."

It's not exactly a state secret that I'm a huge slut for Xbox Achievements. And no, it's not just about the Gamerscore[4], it's also because a game with well-conceived 'chievos encourages the player to try something different – complete a mission without firing any shots, for example, or within a time limit, or perhaps avoiding enemy detection altogether. Or even – and I do think this is something that way too many gamers skip for some reason – completing a game on the hardest difficulty.

Gamers can be so quick to whine about a perceived lack of value in games these days, but what exactly constitutes that "value", anyway? A 60+ hour game, that's really mostly just reiteration? Thanks, but I'll take the 6-8 hour game with replay incentives over one of those every time. NAG

Tarryn van der Byl

[1] Well, I. But I can't admit I secretly listen to Roxette without claiming that everybody else secretly listens to Roxette too. And how could so many people be wrong? Exactly.
[2] Or 350, 400 half-hour cycles. Quite a long phase, that one.
[3] Which I've been practising with at unnecessarily high volume, and with loads of distortion. I figure this way, when the actual banjo arrives, it'll be much less annoying for my neighbours.
[4] It's only mostly about the Gamerscore.

Extra Life

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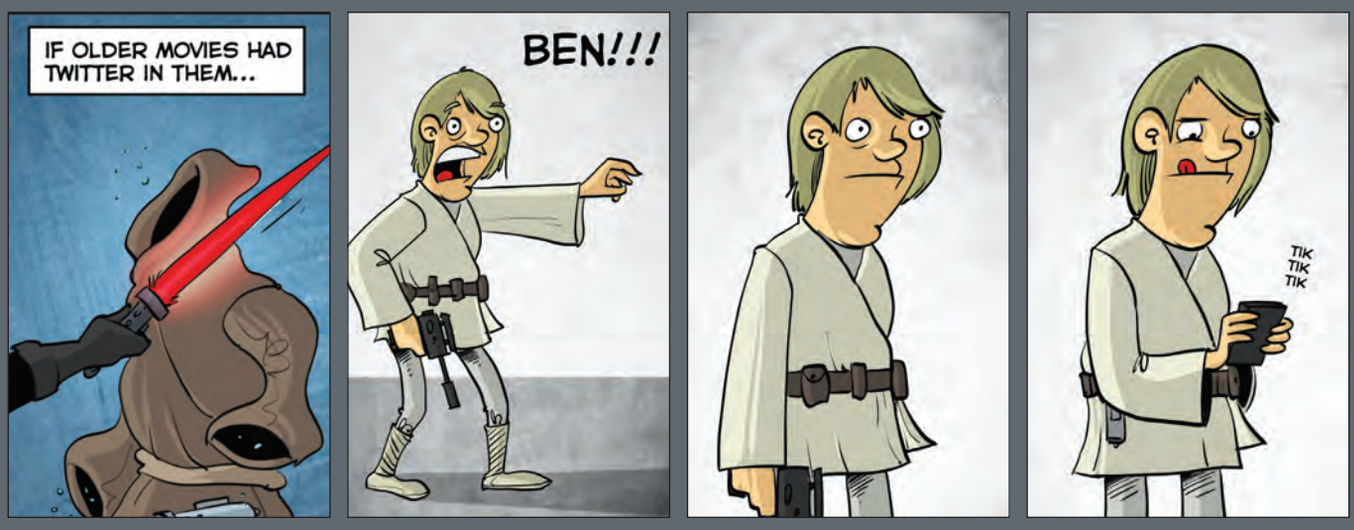

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